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Leadership Practices of Principals of Selected Public Secondary Schools in Kathmandu, Nepal

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Abstract

Academic performance of students from most of the public schools in Nepal is not satisfactory. However, there are a few public schools consistently performing well despite similar students' and teachers' backgrounds, infrastructure and resources. This study explored how principals' understandings and practices of their leadership role may have influenced students' learning.

For this study five higher performing and five lower performing schools from Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) were chosen. In-depth interviews and separate focus group discussions were conducted with the principals. Findings were analyzed under six dimensions of effective school leadership identified from the literature: (a) vision building and goal setting, (b) crafting positive school culture, (c) supporting teachers and students, (d) developing leadership among staff, (e) managing resources, and (f) leading for continuous improvement.

All principals identified challenges in their work, but the principals from lower performing schools identified more challenges. Principals from higher performing schools typically provided more comprehensive accounts of their roles as school leaders.

Key Words: School Leadership, Principal Leadership Effectiveness, Nepal Education, Leadership Understandings, Public Secondary Schools, Leadership Dimensions.

Dedication

to my parents for their unconditional love, support and inspiration.

Acknowledgment

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Chapter 1

1   Introduction

1.1   Background

Nepal is one of the developing countries in South Asia. Situated between two giant

economies, China in the north and India in the south, east and west, it is a multi-ethnic,

secular, federal democratic republic country having an area of 147, 181 sq. kms. With a

population of over 26 million people, it is rich in biological, cultural and linguistic

diversity. According to the 2011 national census, there are 126 ethnic groups having

their own distinctive culture and traditions, and nearly 81 percent of the total population

is Hindu (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). There are over 123 languages spoken as a

mother tongue. Similarly, it has distinctive geographical features, particularly the massive

mountains in the north which include Mt. Everest, highly fertile plains in the south, and

hills and valleys between. Nepal is predominantly an agrarian country with over 78

percent of the total adult population living in rural areas and engaged in agriculture

(Joshi, Conroy & Witcombe, 2012). Nepal ranks 145th on the United Nations Human

Development Report index (UNDP, 2014). Average per capita income is US$ 703, with

nearly a quarter of the population living below the official poverty line (Ministry of

Education [MOE], 2014a). Nepal's overall literacy rate is 65.9 percent; the male literacy

rate is 75.1 percent and the female rate 57.4 percent (MOE, 2014a).

The development of education is a recent phenomenon in Nepal. Education was largely a

perquisite of elites and the ruling class until 1950, who restricted public access to

education (Wood, 1965). As a result, Nepal's educational development during this period remained extremely limited, with a mere two percent of the population being literate by 1951 (Khatry-Chhetry, Pandey, & Wood, 1956, p. 33). Moreover, there were less than 500 students enrolled in higher education between 1918 and 1951 (UNESCO, 2008, p. 18).

With the beginning of democratic practices after the end of autocratic Rana regime in 1951, Nepal has made attempts to systematically develop education sector which remained highly influenced by frequent political changes seen in the country over the years. It was only after the restoration of democracy in 1990, Nepal has placed a high priority on education investments as a key means to transforming society (Carney & Bista, 2009) including opening doors for private education. Nepal currently spends the highest proportion of its national budget on education, of which 85 percent goes to basic and secondary school education alone (Lohani, 2014). Significant quantitative growth in education has been achieved, as is evident from the substantially increased numbers of students, schools and higher educational institutions across the country. According to the Ministry of Education, there were some 35, 223 schools enrolling a total of approximately 7,542,393 students from Grade 1 to 12 in 2013 (2014b pp. 3-10). Of this total, 29, 630 (84%) were public schools employing over 211, 000 teachers and enrolling a total of approximately 6.3 million students. In addition, there were 5, 593 (16%) private schools with over 81,000 teachers enrolling a total of approximately 1.2 million students.

Despite the significant quantitative growth in education, concerns over poor quality of education among the public schools have been growing in recent years (Bhatta, 2008; Joshee, 1994; Sharma, 2012; Thapa, 2012). The Nepalese government's three year

interim plan for 2013-2015 clearly identified school dropout and class repetition in all

grades as causes for alarm, and pointed to lower pass rates, poor quality of professional

development among teachers, and lack of quality in public schools as major challenges

for the immediate future (National Planning Commission, 2013). Khaniya and Kiernan

(1994) note that 70 percent of all dropouts and 53 percent of all repetitions happen in

Grade 1. Mathema (2007) points to high attrition rates as the major education problem in

Nepal, pointing to high rates of repetition, drop outs and failures as the underlying

problem. According to him, "Out of 100 who enter grade one, sixteen reach grade 10 and

only 8 pass the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination"(p. 53). The SLC

examination, popularly regarded as an "Iron Gate", is held at the end of Grade 10 at a

national level as an exit exam for high school achievement and certification. The results

draw huge public attraction, and are widely used as a measure to assess school

effectiveness in Nepal (Thapa, 2011). Success or failure on the SLC exam is highly

determinative of students' future life choices, either opening or closing doors leading to

higher education and the professions (Bhatta, 2005; Mathema & Bista, 2006). Discussing

the failure rate at public schools, Bhatta (2005) noted:

> Unfortunately, failure is more common than success in SLC examinations. An
>
> analysis of the results for the past ten years reveals a failure rate of over 55
>
> percent on average, indicating a huge wastage of the public and private resources
>
> invested in education. Even more serious is the great social cost this high failure
>
> rate places on the nation as most failures occur among students from social and
>
> economically disadvantaged communities studying in public schools in rural
>
> areas. (p. ii)

Carney and Bista (2009), Mathema (2007) and others suggest the poor quality of public schools has seriously undermined public confidence in the education system which, in turn, has encouraged further growth in private education. Studies show that students from private schools have typically demonstrated better academic performance than those from public schools (Caddell, 2007; Joshee 1994; Mathema, 2007, Sharma, 2012; Thapa, 2012). For example, available data from 1994 to 2013 shows an overall 46 percent pass rate in the SLC exam (Bhattarai, 2014), with the public school pass rate falling between 30 and 50 percent, whereas the private school pass rate was 90 percent and above over the last ten years (Rai, 2014). Because of this higher student achievement, private schools have increasingly been attracting students and parents away from the public schools (Mathema, 2007), resulting in the closure or merger of some public schools due to lack of students. Mathema (2013) considers public schools to have become a mere "refuge" for children from poor families given the "mass exodus that is taking place from public to private schools" (p. 8). This not only has created two distinct education systems – public schools for poor and private for rich – within the same national education system, but also has perpetuated stratification of the society threatening social cohesion (Mathema, 2013). In Kathmandu valley alone, the government permanently closed 33 public schools in 2011 and 2012 due to a lack of students, and the District Education Office in Kathmandu has further noted that the closure of public schools will increase significantly over the next five years (Ghimire, 2013). This phenomenon is more intense in urban centers such as in Kathmandu where concentration and expansion of private schools is very high causing extreme pressures on public schools due to the intense competition involved.

According to Bhatta and Budhathoki (2013), 78 percent of all schools in Kathmandu district are private schools, and 70 percent of the total students in Kathmandu attend private schools despite the fact that Kathmandu has higher proportion of public schools compared to other parts of the country and many of these schools are endowed with relatively better resources since they are located at the heart of the capital city having greater influence and access to resources than their counterparts in rural areas. These public schools receive students mostly from poor families and those from the migrant populations whose family members are often illiterate (Bhatta & Budhathoki, 2013; Shrestha, 2014; Subedi, Shrestha, Maharjan, & Suvedi, 2013).

Apparent failures of school improvement efforts in Nepal could be at least partially attributable to a lack of effective school leadership by principals. Furthermore, and of greater immediate importance, addressing the challenges identified by the Ministry of Education will necessarily have to be done through the agency of school leadership, rather than any other possible school improvement strategy. As such, the contributions of school principals cannot be underestimated in the drive for school improvement in Nepal.

1.2   Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore and compare the perceptions school principals held about their leadership role in relatively high and low achieving public secondary schools in Kathmandu Metro City (KMC). More directly, the study focused on exploring and comparing perceptions participants held about their roles and responsibilities as school leaders, the challenges they faced in fulfilling their role, and their conceptions of their role and responsibilities as school leaders.

1.3   Statement of the Problem

During my ten years in teaching and leadership roles in different private schools in

Kathmandu prior to my arrival in Canada in 2011, I personally experienced and observed

differences in the operation, management and performance of private and public schools.

In comparison to the private schools that did not receive any government funding, the

public schools typically had better human and physical resources, at least in the cities.

For example, most public schools had their own land and buildings, teachers were

qualified, trained and well paid as per the government standards, and they received

regular governmental and non-governmental support and funding, and their majority

students comprised of those from poor socio-economic background mostly belonging to

migrant population. Despite this, as discussed earlier the quality of public schools is

generally poor, and the average achievement of public school students in the annual SLC

examinations has been shown to be notably lower than that of private school students, as

illustrated earlier.

There are, nonetheless, a handful of public schools which achieve consistently higher

pass rates than average, and are thus popular among students and parents despite being

similar in terms of students, teachers and infrastructure to other public schools. For

example, among the 148 public secondary schools in Kathmandu district, nine schools

secured a 100 percent pass rate in the 2012 School Leaving Certificate examination

(MOE, 2013). School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exam serves as a measure for

achievement and certification for high school, which is conducted at the end of Grade

Ten at a national level. How could a handful of public schools perform so well, whereas

most public schools lagged far behind despite operating under apparently similar

circumstances? Most of the available research on school effectiveness originating in the West has consistently pointed to socio-cultural differences among student populations as a pervasive influence on school performance. Even so, researchers such as Brookover and Lezotte (1977) and Edmonds (1979) have identified outlier schools whose students achieve significantly higher test scores than would be predicted on the basis of their socio-economic-cultural circumstances. These and other researchers (e.g. Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr & Cohen et al., 2007; Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006; Louis et al., 2010) have consistently identified strong school level leadership as a key contributing factor in these schools. It appears plausible to anticipate similar effects in the public schools in Kathmandu, especially as several studies have expressed concerns over the highly variable levels of professional competence and leadership qualities among public school principals in Nepal (Joshee, 1994; Niraula, 2002; Shrestha, 1982; Shrestha, 2011; UNESCO, 2004).

If not the students, teachers, resources or the infrastructure of the schools, then what other than the school leadership factor can be responsible for the success or the failure of those public schools? Is it because the principals from the higher performing schools understand their role and responsibilities differently and act differently than those in lower performing schools ? After all, individual perceptions of principals are critical for effective school leadership because "what leaders do depends on what they think and feel" (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006b. p. 8). Thus, the statement of the problem addressed in this study was: how do principals of higher and lower performing public secondary schools in Kathmandu describe their leadership practices,

and the challenges they face in discharging their responsibilities as principal, and how do their accounts relate to common leadership dimensions in the literature conceptualizing effective school leadership?

1.4   Research Questions

The research questions answered in this study were focused on exploring the understandings and perceptions principals had about their leadership responsibilities and practices, and the challenges they faced at their schools. Answers to the following three broad questions were sought in the study:

1. How do selected principals describe their role and leadership practices?
2.   How do their accounts relate to the literature on effective school leadership?
3. What do these principals identify as the major challenges in their job?

The interview schedule attached in Appendix A supplemented these broad questions with more specific probes of activities identified in the conceptual framework developed below and summarized in Table 2.3.

1.5   Significance of the Study

Improvement in school education is essential for the success of a developing nation like Nepal. Despite allocating significant funding to education and putting several development strategies in place, student achievement in the public schools is far from satisfactory. This suggests that there is a room for improvement in the leadership understandings and practices of public school principals.

By investigating the leadership understandings and practices of principals of selected public secondary schools, this study sought to develop an informed understanding of the leadership challenges faced by public school principals in Kathmandu, and identify theory-grounded practices that could be adopted in other public schools in an attempt to improve the schools and enhance students' academic performance.

This study provided an important opportunity to explore how public school principals understand their leadership roles and how they performed their tasks. These are critical understandings in mapping out the prevalent leadership practices of school principals to inform planning, policy making and the development of future initiatives to bring improvement in school leadership practices in similar school settings. Additionally, this study provided an opportunity to assemble and share information that could assist principals, educators, school supervisors, policy makers and future researchers to appreciate the school leadership situation in the schools studied.

1.6   Conceptual Framework

The literature on school effectiveness typically considers leadership as central for school improvement and student learning, and outlines school leadership practices of various kinds (Hallinger & Heck 1998; Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008; Mendels, 2012). As explored in detail in Chapter Two, prominent contributors to the literature (e.g., Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr & Cohen, 2007; Day, Sammons, Hopkins, Harris, Leithwood, Gu & Brown, 2010; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005) differ in terms of the number and scope of leadership activities discussed but, as summarized in the Table 2.3, they all fully or partially recognize the following six activities: (a) visioning and goal setting; (b)

building a positive school culture; (c) supporting teachers and students to improve

learning, (d) cultivating leadership qualities in others; (e) managing school resources and

operations; and (f) leading for continuous instructional and organizational improvement.

As discussed in detail in Chapter Two, the commonly recognized leadership practices

identified in Table 2.3 were accepted as providing a conceptual framework for

investigating principals' understandings of school leadership in this study.

1.7 Delimitations

1. This study was limited to the incumbent principals of five higher performing and five

    lower performing public secondary schools within the KMC. Only the government

    funded community schools were considered to be public schools.

2. Among other available qualitative methods, this study primarily used in-depth

    interview and focus group discussion as data collection methods.

3. Only public secondary school principals who had had at least five years' continuous

    experience as a principal of the selected study schools were accepted as participants

    in this study.

4. Perceptions and understandings of other stakeholders such as staff members,

    students, parents, and community people were not included in this study.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

Principal: Principal is the officially designated chief official in a school who is

responsible and accountable for managing resources and instructional activities, and for

planning and improving the school. 'Headteacher' is popular term used in Nepal to refer to the head of a public school, whereas 'principal' is more common term used by private schools. In this thesis, both the terms 'headteacher' and 'principal' have been used interchangeably.

Secondary Level: In the context of Nepal, secondary level refers to the school instructional program from Grade 9 to Grade 10.

School Leaving Certificate (SLC) Examination: A nationwide examination conducted by the Ministry of Education at the end of Grade 10 as an exit exam for high school certificate. This exam is based mostly on written tests in six compulsory and two optional subjects each scored out of a total 100 marks as well as practical exams conducted in English, Computer and Accounting.

Private Schools: Private schools are funded and managed privately by individuals and/or organizations such as private companies, missionaries, trusts, and charitable organizations. They are required to follow the national education law and regulations. They are mostly conducted in English. Private schools are either required to register as a non-profit trust or as a business company. These schools are also called institutional schools, and they are allowed to charge tuition fees. These schools mostly receive students from families from higher socio-economic backgrounds, and they are mostly concentrated in cities.

Public Schools: Public schools are community schools supported partially or fully by the national government and provide tuition free for students studying from Grade 1 to Grade

10. The language of instruction is primarily Nepali. Public schools across the country mostly receive students from poorer socio-economic backgrounds.

School Management Committee (SMC): SMC is a legally constituted local governing body formed at the school level involving parents of students, teachers and the principal in order to support the management, operations and planning of schools. SMCs are more active and play more important roles in public schools than private schools where they are usually a formality.

District Education Office (DEO): Nepal is divided into 75 districts and each district has a District Education Office headed by a District Education Officer. DEOs are district level government bodies under the Ministry of Education responsible for implementing government programs, regulations, and directives and monitoring, supervising and planning education programs and activities in the district. Ideally, both the public and private schools come under the jurisdiction of DEO since both types of schools operate within the same education system, but in practice only public schools are strictly monitored and supervised to ensure compliance. Private schools typically enjoy greater freedom in operation, management and planning of their schools.

Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC): KMC is the capital city of Nepal and the only metro city which lies in Kathmandu district, which is one of the three districts within Kathmandu valley. Kathmandu valley lies in the central development region which is the most densely populated region in the country with over 2.5 million populations as per the 2011 census, having strong political, economic, historical and cultural influence. In 2012, Kathmandu district had 293 public schools compared to 1074 private schools, four

times as many than public schools. There were 95,554 students in public schools and 2, 07,816 students in private schools, twice as many students than public schools in 2012. The pass rate in SLC exam in 2012 was 56.79 percent from the total of 9002 students who sat the exam from public schools, but 91.70 percent among the 22,488 students who took the exam from private schools.

School Inspectors: School Inspectors are government officials accountable to the District Education Officer (DEO) and assigned to supervise and monitor public schools and their activities in the district.

Resource Person (RP): Resource Person is a government official working under the supervision of the District Education Officer, and designated to provide instructional support to public schools in the district.

Ministry of Education (MOE): Ministry of Education is the main government body responsible for overall development of education in the country. It is responsible for formulating educational policies and plans, and managing and implementing them across the country through its various agencies. Important agencies include the Department of Education (DOE) at the national level and District Education Office (DEO) at the district level.

Infrastructure: In this study, infrastructure mainly refers to basic physical aspects of a school such as school building, classrooms, furniture, toilets, playground, telephone, electricity, labs and library and so on.

1.9   Chapter Summary and Organization of the Report

This thesis consists of six chapters. This first chapter has sought to provide an introduction to and overview of the study. The second chapter offers a review of related literature culminating in detailed descriptions of the six dimensions of school leadership adopted as a conceptual framework as identified in Table 2.3.The third chapter provides a more detailed account of education in Nepal to better establish the organizational and policy context for the study. The fourth chapter describes the research design and methodology under the main headings of data collection and data analysis. The fifth chapter presents the findings from the data analysis, with specific attention to the six leadership dimensions. The sixth and final chapter summarizes the study, presents conclusions and offers recommendations. The end matter includes the list of references and the appendices.

Chapter 2

2   Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to review the theoretical perspectives guiding the study and outline in greater detail the dimensions of school leadership adopted as the conceptual framework for the enquiry.

2.1   Leadership

According to Yukl (2006), leadership is "the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives" (p.8). Owens and Valesky (2001) state that "leadership deals with exercising influence on others through social interaction" (p. 202). They consider leadership to be a group function that takes place when two or more people interact, and leaders seek to influence behavior of others during those interactions. Northouse (2013) defines leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 5). According to Richmon and Allison (2003) academic treatments of leadership have included accepting it as "a process of exercising influence, a way of inducing compliance, a measure of personality, a form of persuasion, an effect of interaction, an instrument of goal achievement, a means for initiating structure, a negotiation of power relationships or a way of behaving" (p. 34). Leithwood and Riehl (2003) claim leadership is all about "providing direction and exercising influence" (p. 3).

From all the definitions presented above, it appears 'influence' is central to the leadership in getting things done by people in achieving common goals. Different leadership approaches and styles are available for how leaders influence their followers in getting things done. Henman (2005) claims that leadership style influences the leadership effectiveness: "the leader's style or manner of dealing with the organization's members and communicating with them contributes to or detracts from the group's overall functioning" (p. 6). As such, he considers that choosing a leadership style appropriate to the context is important since different situations call for different leadership styles. As Sergiovanni (2007) states, "Context plays a key role in deciding whether certain approaches to leadership will be effective or not" (p. 1).

Three main theoretical frameworks have dominated the study of leadership in the recent past, the trait approach, behavioral approaches, and contingency or situational approaches. Trait theory, also popularly known as "great man" theory, holds that effective leaders have certain traits such as intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability, and 'great' leaders have these and perhaps additional qualities to the extent that enables them to be great leaders (Northouse, 2013). The behavioral approach focuses on how people behave toward others, rather than on personal traits such as personality, height or intelligence (Northouse, 2013). A dominant behavioral approach concentrates on how leaders show and balance concerns for the individuals for whom they are responsible and the productivity of the group. As pioneered by Fiedler (1967), the contingency approach predicts leadership effectiveness on the basis of the extent to which a leader's task-oriented and person-oriented predispositions are suited for differing social situations. The leadership preference of a social situation is determined by degree

of trust and respect for the leader among group members, how well the tasks group members must accomplish are structured, and a leader's control over rewards and punishments for group members. As theorized by Fielder, certain combinations of these circumstances favor person-oriented leaders, while others favor task-oriented leaders. House (1971) has discussed how subordinates' characteristics and characteristics of the work place influence how leaders behave and the effectiveness of their leadership. Overall, trait, behavioral and contingency approaches have each contributed to the understanding of leadership, but none have offered fully satisfactory explanations of leadership and leadership effectiveness.

2.2   Effective School Leadership

"*Scratch the surface on an excellent school and you are likely to find an excellent principal. Peer into a failing school and you will find weak leadership*" (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p 2).

School leaders are regarded as central to the task of overall school improvement with crucial roles to play in promoting student learning, improving quality in education, and building and sustaining successful, welcoming, productive schools (Darling-Hammond et al. 2007; Ediger, 1998; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al. 2008; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003;), and they are widely recognized as the key change agent at all levels in a school system (Fullan, 2006).

Historically, overall responsibility for the school's operation has fallen to a single individual, the principal. The role of the principal of the last century has been largely vested in managerial expertise (Portin, Alejano, Knapp, & Marzolf, 2006). Successful

schools in the mid-20th century were often identified as clean and regimented

institutions. The shift from viewing principals as managers to seeing them as leaders has

involved consideration of (a) the exercise of leadership in relation to learning; (b)

conceptions of leadership roles and the allocation of school leaders' authority; and (c) the

forces and conditions driving change in leadership roles and responsibilities. According

to the National Association for Elementary School Principals (2008) in the USA,

> ... the role of principal continues to become more complex and challenging.
> Traditional leaders may have considered their jobs to be solely the managers of
> schools. But the current social and educational context-which combines high-
> stakes accountability with the high ideals of supporting social, physical and
> emotional needs of children demands that principals demonstrate the vision,
> courage and skill to lead and advocate for effective learning communities in which
> all students-and adults-reach their highest potential. (p. 2)

Much of the available literature on school leadership effectiveness indicates that school

leaders play an important role by exerting their influence over several factors, including,

most importantly, teachers (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, &

Wahlstrom, 2004). Effective school leadership directly affects teacher capacity,

motivation, and commitment and working conditions, all of which directly affects

teaching practices linked to student learning and achievement (Leithwood et al. 2008).

Moreover, school leaders influence student learning by encouraging and supporting

teachers to invest in their professional development, focus on student learning, and

participate in professional learning communities (Hargreaves, Halasz & Pont; 2007).

While only a small body of research links principals directly to student achievement

(Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2009), a much larger research base documents principals' effectiveness on school operations through motivating teachers and students, identifying and articulating vision and goals, developing high performance expectations, fostering communication, allocating resources, and developing organizational structures to support instruction and learning (Knapp, Copland, Plecki & Portin, 2006).

According to Day et al. (2010), the educational values of principals, their reflective strategies and leadership practices highly shape the internal processes of school organizations and pedagogies adopted, which all have significant impact in student learning. These scholars also claim that the leadership of the principal has a direct effect on teachers' expectations and standards. This includes the way teachers think about, plan and conduct their teaching and learning practices, their self-efficacy, commitment, sense of wellbeing, and their organizational trust and faithfulness, all of which influence student outcomes.

 Leaders' effects on learning appear to involve "professional learning" and "system learning" (Portin et al., 2006, pp. 11-12). Professional learning refers to the range of skills, knowledge, and values that teachers and administrators gain from practice, through formal attempts to develop their professional capacities while on the job, and from initial preparation for their professional positions. System learning refers to knowledge about the functioning of the school system as a whole and the development and assessment of new policies, practices, and structures intended to improve its performance (Knapp, Copland & Talbert, 2003).
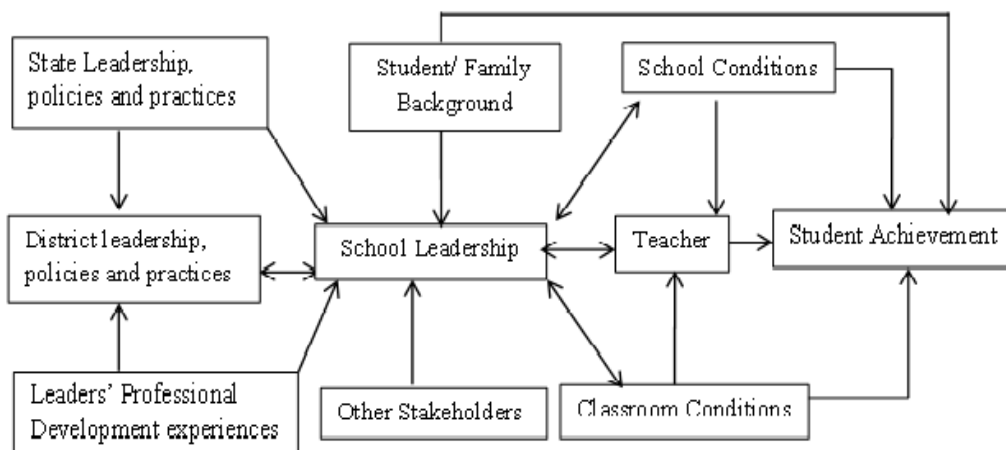
Figure 2.1: Leadership influences on student learning. Adapted from investigating the links to improved student learning: Final report of research findings (p. 14) by Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson (2010).

According to Louis et al. (2010), school leaders influence student learning mainly through establishing appropriate school conditions by setting goals, influencing culture, setting parameters for classroom conditions through designing and managing curricular planning and resource allocations, and also by directly influencing teachers. School leaders and school conditions are influenced by a number of interacting factors such as state and district level policies and practices, outside stakeholders (for example community, media, interest groups), leaders' own professional experiences and practices, students and their family background, which all are directly responsible for student learning as shown in the Figure 2.1.

Leithwood, Anderson, Mascall and Strauss (2010) offer a 'four paths' model as shown in Figure 2.2 through which school leaders exercise their influence to improve student

learning. The four paths are emotional, rational, organizational and family, each of which is seen as a way through which school leadership practices can influence student learning and school success.
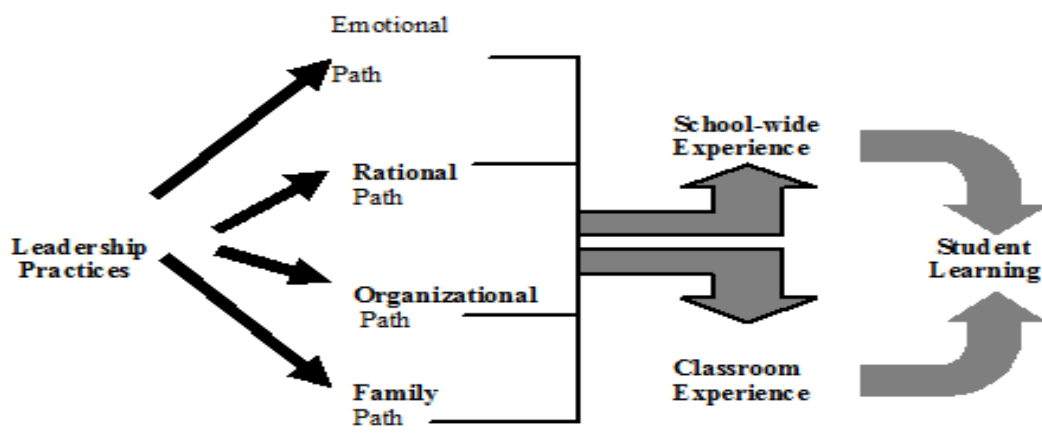
Figure 2.2: Four paths of leadership influence on student learning. Adapted from School leaders' influences on student learning: The four paths by Leithwood, K., Anderson, S. E., Mascall, B., & Strauss, T. (2010), *The principles of educational leadership and management, 13-30.*

Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom (2004) consider leadership as second only to classroom instruction in influencing student learning. Although the majority of their findings indicate modest to small effects of principal leadership on student learning, they found leadership to have much stronger effects in struggling schools in difficult situations. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) also report strong leadership effects on student learning, particularly among the exceptional schools that excel beyond expectation. They note that successful leaders influence student learning mainly by

creating vision, setting goals, supporting teachers and providing conditions that promotes teaching and learning.

Hallinger and Heck (1998) reviewed 40 studies investigating principal's effectiveness on student achievement conducted between 1980 to 1995. They found that school leadership effects on student learning were mostly indirect, yet significant and meaningful. In particular, they found that school leaders influence student learning mainly through setting the vision, goals and tone for a school, but also through creating school structure and building organizational culture.

The most comprehensive study available so far reporting directly on effect size by leadership dimension on student learning is by Viviane Robinson and her colleagues (2007, 2011). In their   research involving meta analysis of the research reporting on leadership impact on student learning, they found the following five leadership dimensions having moderate to significant impacts on student learning based on effect size: a) promoting and participating in teacher learning and development; b) planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum; c) establishing goals and expectations; d) strategic resourcing; and e) ensuring and orderly and supportive environment. Among the five leadership dimensions, the leading for teaching learning and development through formal and informal learning opportunities was found to be the most significant leadership dimension having effect size 0.84(effect size less than 0.2 is considered weak effect measured in a scale 0-1). According to Robinson (2011), "the most powerful way that school leaders can make a difference to the learning of their students is by promoting and participating in the professional learning and development of their teachers "(p. 104).   Similarly, the researchers also found the three additional

leadership dimensions that had positive impact on student learning, which include: a) creating educationally powerful connections, b) engaging in constructive problem talk, and c) selecting, developing, and using smart tools.

The Wallace Foundation (2006) report also highlighted important connections between achievement and instructional leadership by the school leaders, and it has noted six standards for effective school leadership practice: (a) facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community; (b) advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth; (c) ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment; (d) collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources; (e) acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner; and (f) understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

Day et al. (2010) note that effective principals, (a) define their values and vision to raise expectations, set direction and build trust; (b) reshape the conditions for teaching and learning; (c) restructure parts of the organization and redesign leadership roles and responsibilities; (d) enrich the curriculum; (e) enhance teacher quality; (f) enhance the quality of teaching and learning; (g) build collaboration internally, and (h) build strong relationships outside the school community.

Leithwood et al. (2004) suggest that assessment of educational leadership should focus on leadership behaviors defined by the intersection of six core components of school performance and six key processes, which together make up their conception of principal and team school leadership. Their assessment model does not envision direct effects of leadership behaviors on student success rather that the leadership behaviors lead to changes in school performance, which in turn lead to student success. The six key processes refer to the manner in which leadership influences others in achieving six core components. Their framework mainly focuses on behaviors of the leaders and the interactions they have with teachers and students. The core components are (a) high standards for student learning; (b) rigorous curriculum; (c) quality instruction; (d) a culture of learning and professional behavior; (e) connections to external communities; and (f) systemic performance accountability. The key processes are, (a) planning; (b) implementing; (c) supporting; (d) advocating; (e) communicating, and (f) monitoring.

While exploring the leadership dimensions for effective school leadership, all the sources reviewed differ in terms of the number of leadership dimensions identified, but they all fully or partially recognize the following six activities, as shown by the check marks in Table 2.3: (a) visioning and goal setting; (b) building a positive school culture; (c) supporting teachers and students to improve learning; (d) cultivating leadership qualities in others; (e)managing school resources and operation; and (f) leading for continuous instructional and organizational improvement.

Table 2.3 The Leadership Dimensions

	Principal Leadership Dimensions	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
a.	Visioning and goal setting	√	√	√		√	√	√	√
b.	Building positive school culture	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
c.	Supporting teachers and students to improve learning	√	√	√	√		√	√	√
d.	Cultivating leadership in others	√	√	√	√				√
e.	Managing school resources and operation	√	√	√		√	√	√	√
f.	Leading for continuous improvement	√	√	√				√	√

a. The Wallace Foundation (2013)
b. Leithwood (2012)
c. Day et al.(2010)
d. Darling-Hammond, et al. (2007)
e. Council of Chief State School Officers (2008)
f. Leithwood and Jantzi (2005)
g. Louis et al.(2010)
h. Robinson (2007, 2011)

The following paragraphs discuss each of these six leadership dimensions in more detail.

2.2.1 Visioning and Goal Setting

Vision is widely recognized as one of the key components of effective school leadership (Bush, 2011). Sergiovanni (2007) defines vision as the "capacity to create and communicate a view of a desired state of affairs that induces commitment among those working in the organization" (p. 10). Collaboratively setting school targets can require a significant amount of effort to motivate teachers and staff. It is about defining a shared purpose as an essential stimulant for action. Specific practices in setting targets are recognized as building a shared vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, and demonstrating high-performance expectations from students (Hallinger & Heck, 2002).These specific practices reflect, but also add to, three functions in Yukl's

managerial taxonomy of motivating and inspiring, clarifying roles and objectives, and planning and organizing (Yukl, 1991).

According to Walker et al. (2002), "The vision embodies people's highest values and aspirations. It inspires people to reach for what could be to rise about their fears and preoccupations with current realities" (p. 1). A vision offers a picture of the future that people aspire to reach from their existing realities; a vision guides us, gives us direction and purpose, and can serve as a powerful motivator for those around us and ourselves. In order to truly guide and motivate, Bush (2011) contends a vision must be aligned with the core values of both the individuals and the institution, and be effectively communicated to and accepted by everyone involved in the system.

Leithwood et al. (2004) maintain that leadership practices that set directions account for the largest share of a leader's impact. This set of practices is aimed at helping teachers develop shared understandings about the institution and its activities and goals that can under-bind a sense of purpose or vision. They argue that people become motivated by goals which they find personally compelling, especially if they are seen as challenging and achievable. Having such goals helps people make sense of their work and enables them to find a sense of identity for themselves within their work place.

Goal setting helps in providing a coherence to many activities and efforts by aligning them toward the student well-being and their learning (Robinson, 2011, p. 45). Goal setting involves about deciding the types of goals to be set, involving others in goal setting process in order to develop ownership among the stakeholders about the goals

and communicating widely among the concerned members of the community (Robinson, 2011).

Highly effective school leaders inspire others around them by providing clear sense of purpose and direction through creating shared vision focused to academic excellence involving organizational values (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Besides setting higher expectations for students and teachers, successful school leaders collaborate with stakeholders in identifying and setting goals aligned with their vision of academic excellence, communicate regularly their vision and goals to the stakeholders, and monitor and assess the progress made regularly (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Hallinger & Heck 1992).

Clark (2014) expands on the process of goal setting by noting the following four points he considers important for school leaders:

(a) The goals should be realistic and attainable.

(b) The goals should be targeted to improve the school system (moral, academic and infrastructure).

(c) The goal-setting process should include the maximum number of stakeholders so that they will feel a sense of ownership that will drive them to achieve the goals.

(d) A process and completion indicator should be developed for each goal.

2.2.2   Building a Positive School Culture

Sergiovanni (2007) notes successful schools are characterized with "strong and functional culture aligned with vision of academic excellence" (p. 11). He further notes:

> This culture serves as a compass setting to steer people in a common
> direction; provides a set of norms that defines what people should
> accomplish and how; and provides a source of meaning and significance
> for teachers, students, administrators , and others as they work. (p. 12)

He considers schools as places that are loosely connected around management themes but tightly connected around cultural themes, which means members of the school community are likely to be more highly influenced by aspects of a school's culture than by management rules and bureaucratic procedures. In other words, teachers and students are influenced highly by values, beliefs, relationships and socialization activities rather than by rules and regulations imposed from outside. Hence, the task of school leaders in this respect is to focus on the cultural aspects of school life which are more informal, subtle and symbolic, with a view to fostering a strong functional culture promoting growth and achievement.

Deal and Peterson (1994) argue school leaders are key to shaping school culture because they communicate core values through their everyday work, reinforcing values in their interactions with teachers, students and parents, as well as other members of the community when they visit the school and participate in celebrations and governance activities. Deal and Peterson summarize their rich account by describing how school leaders can reshape a school's culture by constantly and consistently communicating core

values in what they say and do, by honoring those who have worked to serve the students and the purpose of the school, by observing rituals and traditions that support the mission of the school, by celebrating staff and student accomplishments, and recounting stories of success and achievement that showcase cherished values.

Research has shown that school culture plays a significant role in promoting school effectiveness (Heck & Marcoulides, 1996; Sammons et al., 1995). High commitment and high performance are frequently identified as distinguishing features of schools with a healthy culture characterized by collegial and collaborative interactions and high levels of self-determination (Sergiovanni, 2006). Several studies have illustrated the critical influence of school principals on school culture, and the effect of positive school cultures on teachers' performance and wellbeing (Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

Successful school leaders build collegial relationships with stakeholders based on care, respect, and trust in order to develop a strong learning community (Leithwood, 2012). Besides regularly communicating core values, norms and beliefs through their actions, successful school leaders highly promote collaboration among the members of the school community, motivate and inspire teachers and students, demonstrate highly ethical behavior, maintain transparency and appreciations for others, and they remain highly visible and easily accessible (Leithwood, 2012; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

2.2.3   Supporting Teachers and Students to Improve Learning

According to Yukl, Gordon and Taber (2002), supporting refers to "showing

consideration, acceptance, and concern for the needs and feelings of other people" (p. 20)

which contributes strongly towards follower satisfaction with the leader and improves

interpersonal relationships. Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2008) note that school

leaders support teachers in order to improve their performances through building their

capacities, improving working conditions, and through motivation as shown in Figure 2.3

below, which ultimately contributes towards improving teaching and learning. They

report strong and positive influences on teachers' motivation, commitments and beliefs

regarding the supportiveness of their working conditions which, in turn, had greater

influence on classroom instruction. Although building capacity of teachers has been

regarded as an important function of the principals, these researchers found that school

leaders have substantial influence on motivation and working conditions of the teachers.
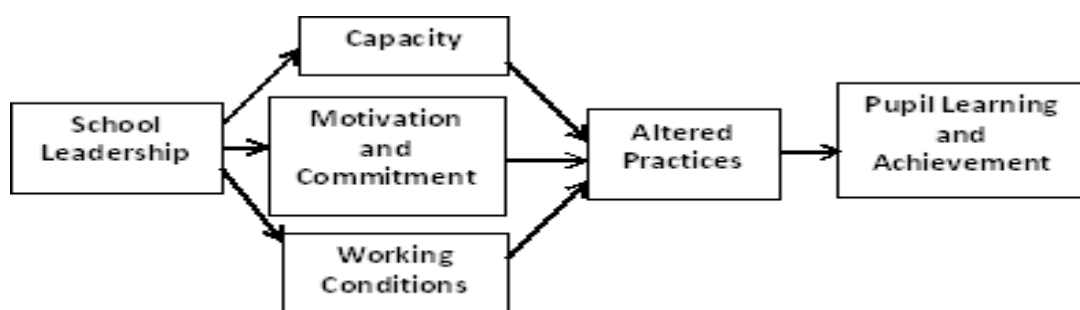
Figure 2.3: The effects of school leadership on teacher capacity, motivation, commitment

and beliefs about working conditions. Adapted from Leithwood, K., Harris, A., and

Hopkins, D. (2008). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. *School leadership and management*, *28*(1), 27-42.

Promoting and developing teachers professional learning through formal and informal learning opportunities has been regarded as one of the most significant leadership dimension having significant impact on student learning (Robinson, 2007, 2011). According to Robinson, " the most important reason for the effect in that direct involvement in professional learning enables leaders to learn in detail about the challenges the learning presents and the conditions teachers require to succeed (p. 105).

Supporting is an important process to ensure the resources necessary to achieve the set goals are available and used well. Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) link supportive activities to transformational leadership. Successful leadership ensure that their teachers have expertise by providing instructional support and resources necessary to excel in their profession; provide safe and orderly school environment; they are sensitive in addressing to the needs of their individual student (Leithwood, 2012; Council of Chief State School Officers , 2008). Conley (1991) states that effective school leaders devote considerable time to supporting teachers in their efforts to strengthen the quality of instruction. He discusses how this support is provided in varied forms encompassing both financial and technological dimensions, with leaders confirming that teachers have the necessary materials and resources required to be effective instructors. Newmann (1997) offers a similar view, discussing how leaders invest in the social and human capital of their schools by providing access to new sources of knowledge and making sure teachers have high-quality opportunities to expand, enhance, and refine their instructional skills. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) have also shown how school leaders demonstrate

personal interest in teachers and staff, and make themselves available to them. Berman and McLaughlin (1978) discuss how school leaders provide support for high-quality instruction by seeking to provide guidance for teachers working to integrate skills learned during professional development activities into their instructional behaviors.

2.2.4   Managing School Resources and Operation

 Management involves coordinating staff, hiring appropriate people for the organization, addressing everyday organizational issues including pursuing goals aimed at fulfilling the vision of the organization (House & Aditya, 1997). Koontz and O'Donnell (1978) note that management is concerned with setting up and sustaining a productive, orderly, working environment in an organization. The role of the manager is one of stewardship, necessitating qualities of good administration, abilities to make efficient and effective use of resources (Sharma, 2009). A manager's role is to plan, implement, monitor, and control activities over relatively short time frames, specific tasks including budgeting, managing workflows and systems, and coordinating resources, including people (Kotter, 1990a & 1990b). However, leadership is necessary to avoid and handle crisis in the right way and at the right time. Management functions can potentially provide leadership and leadership activities can contribute to managing. Nevertheless, some managers do not lead, and some leaders do not manage (Bass, 1985). Although the conceptual distinctions made are not always clear, there appears to be a general recognition in the literature that a proper balance of leadership and management is required to successfully operate any organization.

According to Leithwood (2012), school leaders who focus on overall organizational management have greater impact on raising student achievement by developing appropriate school conditions focused to academic excellence. Successful school leaders ensure their school policies, planning, operating procedures, organizational structures are designed in a way that promotes collaboration and cooperation among the members which offers maximum opportunity for the teachers and staff to become more competent and productive. Moreover, they ensure resources are allocated strategically in order to maximize student learning (Leithwood, 2012; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

2.2.5   Cultivating Leadership Qualities in Others

The primary aim of developing teachers and staff in schools is building not only the knowledge and skills that teachers and other staff need in order to better accomplish organizational goals, but also to enhance commitment, capacity and resilience to persist in applying appropriate knowledge and skills. Following Gray (2000) and Harris and Chapman, (2002) more specific practices within this leadership dimension include providing individualized support and consideration, fostering intellectual stimulation, and modeling appropriate values and behaviors.

Leithwood et al. (2004) report that in both school and non-school organizations the contribution of leaders' effects on their co-workers is substantial. Leaders' actions can positively influence the attitudes and actions of others through intellectual stimulation, individualized support and providing appropriate models of best practice and beliefs considered fundamental to the organization's success. In essence, successful school leaders develop leadership qualities in others by promoting collaboration through their

actions by involving teachers in decision making and planning, developing instructional and leadership capacity, offering intellectual stimulation, providing individual support and providing appropriate models of best practices, and by offering leadership opportunities to their teachers and staff (Leithwood, 2012, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008, Day et al., 2010).

2.2.6   Promoting Continuous Improvement

As discussed by Leithwood, (2006) the practices included in promoting continuous instructional and organizational improvement are concerned with establishing working conditions that allow teachers and other staff to make the most of their motivations, commitments and capacities. He states that school leadership practices explain significant variations in teachers' beliefs about and responses to their working conditions. Specific practices identified by him and others include building collaborative cultures, restructuring and reculturing the organization, building productive relations with parents and the community, and connecting the school to its wider environment (Chrisman, 2005; Louis & Kruse, 1998; West, Ainscow& Stanford, 2005). Comparable practices in Yukl's (1991) managerial taxonomy include managing conflict and team building, delegating, consulting and networking. The contribution of schools to student learning most certainly depends on the motivations and capacities of teachers and administrators, acting both individually and collectively. But organizational conditions sometimes wear down educators' good intentions and prevent the use of effective practices.

In sum, successful educational leaders develop their schools as effective organizations that support and sustain the performance of teachers and students through strengthening

school cultures, modifying organizational structures, and building collaborative processes. The purpose of reforming the organizational cultures and structures is to support the work of organizational members and the flexibility of structures should go with the changing nature of the school's improvement goals.

2.3   School Leadership in Developing World

Unlike western mainstream educational leadership models that view school leadership as being participatory, collaborative, interpersonal, democratic with a focus on instructional leadership, school leadership models in developing countries place less emphasis on participation, collective decision making, team building, and instructional leadership (Opltka, 2004). After examining school leadership in developing countries covering South Asia, South East Asia, and Africa by reviewing 27 school leadership journals, Oplatka (2004) concluded that school leadership models and practices in developing countries differ significantly from what is found in developed countries. According to him, "It is likely that particular contextual conditions in which schools in many developing countries work and the cultural values defining the role of the principal constitute an obstacle to more profound acceptance of this [Western] leadership model by principals" (p. 434). He attributes the less inclusive school leadership practices in developing countries to the lower priorities accorded to education in general and school leadership in particular. This, in turn, often results in the (a) lack of major education reform, (b) insufficient budget allocations for education, and (c) a lack of focus on defining and articulating the importance of the school leadership role and its functions.

Despite education reforms focusing on decentralization in some developing countries during 1990s, education systems in many developing countries have remained highly centralized, which severely limits school leaders' autonomy, restricting the scope for the exercise of leadership and thereby leaving school leaders to focus on routine administrative jobs and managing resources (Anderson & Mundy, 2014; Chapman, 2000; Oduro, Dachi, Fertig & Rarieya, 2007; Opltka, 2004). For example, in his review, Opltka (2004) found the ministry of education, the apex government body responsible for education in all countries in the survey, retained power over major aspects of education including designing curriculum, preparing text books, managing examinations, funding, teachers' training and selection, and recruitment and promotion of teachers, leaving only routine administrative tasks to school leaders. Hence, school leaders were found to focus on routine administrative jobs rather than instructional planning, promoting academic quality, setting goals and introducing innovative and proactive management systems at their schools:

> Principals in developing countries were found to focus, by and large, on routine management, control maintenance and output-based teacher appraisal, and were likely to refrain from involving teachers and parents in decision –making, participative leadership, delegation of responsibilities , or major school change initiation. (p. 440)

Furthermore, in his review, he found principals in developing countries focused mostly on basic needs and functions due to the tightly limited physical and human resources available to them. For example, fund raising was found to be the most dominant activity of principals in developing countries. Besides that school leaders in developing countries

faced a number of other challenges due to politics, with nepotism and favoritism in the appointment of teachers, forming school management committees, and securing funding being the most prevalent (Opltak, 2004).

Policy and programs focusing on developing effective school leaders is severely limited, and "principals mainly learn informally within the workplace how to do their work (Anderson & Mundy, 2014, p.8). For example, in his study involving four successful secondary school principals in the city of Dhaka, Bangladesh, Salahuddin (2012) found that the principals led their schools mainly based on their experiential knowledge without having any theoretical knowledge of school leadership since they had no opportunity to participate in formal leadership training. Besides administrative and managerial responsibilities, these school leaders are expected to supervise instruction in order to improve quality in education following the decentralization of education in many developing countries, but the centralized education management structure often appoints school inspectors or supervisors from outside the school context thereby removing or supplanting the principal from this key function (Chapman, 2000).

Preetika and Priti (2013) investigated the challenges faced by principals at five different types of schools in India using qualitative interviews. They found that principals were confronted mostly with students' absenteeism and lack of support from their parents. Although all principals appeared to have understood the importance of parental involvement, the problem was how to get parents to collaborate meaningfully towards school improvement. They found frequent changes of school principals posed another challenge in maintaining consistency in schools. Most principals experienced difficulties motivating their teachers, the majority of whom appeared to lack a sense of

accountability. They considered the job security enjoyed by public school teachers without proper accountability made them mostly indifferent toward their profession.

Yang and Brayman (2010) interviewed 40 principals from middle schools and high schools in China to investigate their leadership perceptions and challenges. Among the major challenges reported were (a) a lack of autonomy, with schools being strongly controlled by the government, (b) increased pressures for testing with less emphasis on overall development of students, (c) increased workloads due to teachers being required to carry out political duties mandated by the government alongside their regular classroom teaching duties, (d) lack of support from the community and the government, and (e) lack of resources.

In a research conducted by Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO, 2009), school leaders in the Maldives reported their major challenges as being lack of community support, poor communication between parents and the schools, lack of cooperation from parents, political instability and political division, lack of trained teachers, lack of autonomy, lack of resources, and disciplinary problems among students, including high dropout rates. The research further notes the possibility of school leadership in developing countries as being more autocratic rather than participative or democratic, and lacking instructional leadership with an overriding focus on routine administrative tasks.

Onderi and Makori (2013) note that secondary school principals in Kenya work under very challenging and complex circumstances. Their study involving 87 principals from across the country found that these principals mainly faced problems with poor security, rising sectarian conflicts and tensions, disciplinary and behavioral issues among students,

drug and substance abuse, violence, and lack of resources. The situation was complicated by increasing pressures from various stakeholders. They also found that the principals did not have professional development opportunities and support to help them perform better in their job, which impeded their provision of guidance and counseling to their students.

2.4   Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed literature addressing leadership, school leadership, principals' roles and responsibilities, and related research investigating the challenges faced by school leaders in developing nations. The education system and policies of Nepal are the focus of the following chapter.

Chapter 3

3   **Education System and Policy in Nepal**

This study focused on the leadership role of selected school principals in Nepal. It is important for readers to understand the Nepalese education system and policy to appreciate the study's context. Hence this chapter reviews the education system and policy of Nepal in greater detail than that provided in the introduction.

3.1   Education system

Formal education in Nepal is divided into school education and higher education. School education is divided into the pre-primary level, primary level (Grade 1-5), lower secondary level (Grades 6-8), secondary level (Grade 9-10), and higher secondary level (Grade 11-12). However, the new proposed educational structure according to the School Sector Reform Project (SSRP) developed by Ministry of Education in 2009 (MOE, 2015) will consist of basic education from Grades 1 to 8 and secondary education from Grades 9 to 12. Currently, students take the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination, which is managed by Secondary Education Board (SEB), at the end of Grade 10. The Higher Secondary Education Board (HSEB) is responsible for managing and supervising higher secondary level education for Grades 11 and 12. Higher education consists of three to five years of study for a Bachelor's degree followed by two years for master's degree. Additionally, universities also offer a two year Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.) degree, and three to six year programs for a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree, the highest level education degree in the country.

There are mainly two types of schools in Nepal, public schools and private schools.
Public schools are recognized by the government as community schools which are fully
or partially managed and financially supported by the government. The 2007 interim
constitution of Nepal, as well as the recently promulgated new constitution 2015, has
made school education free up to secondary level, although some public schools continue
to charge tuition fees (Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development
[CERID], 2005; Thapa, 2011). Besides receiving government support, these schools are
also supported by local government bodies, non-government organizations/international
non-government organizations (NGOs/INGOs) and the community. Public schools are
categorized further into community-aided, community-managed, and community-
unaided. Community-aided schools are fully supported and managed by the government;
community-managed schools are also fully supported by the government, but are
managed by the local community. There are 8,000 community managed schools in the
country (Lohani, 2014). Community-unaided schools are supported and managed by the
community but do not receive regular government support as do other schools. In this
study, both community schools and community managed schools are referred to as public
schools. Based on government teacher deployment system in the country, the Student
Teacher Ratio (STR) for all public secondary schools in the country in 2013 was 31,
whereas in Kathmandu, it was 15 in 2013 (MOE, 2014b).

Private schools, also known as institutional schools, are funded and managed privately by
individuals and/or organizations such as private companies, missionaries, trust, and
charitable organizations. They are allowed to collect tuition fees from their students.
Most of these schools are run for profit, but a few operate as a social service such as

those run by missionaries, charging nominal fees. Even so, most for profit schools are not particularly expensive. The great majority of private schools are concentrated in the cities. For example, one fifth of the country's private schools are located in Kathmandu district alone (Subedi et al., 2013). Moreover, there are great variations among the private schools in terms of their vision, philosophical approach, size, infrastructure, fee structure, services provided, and their influence. The government has classified private schools under four distinct categories from A to D based on the availability of facilities and resources, infrastructure, school performance, number of students, and management (Subedi et al., 2013), and the classification is primarily used in determining their tuition fees. There are few private schools targeted at elites with very high fee structures, some private schools with moderate fee structure targeted to mostly middle class parents, but the great majority of private schools are low cost. These are spread all over the country serving all segments of society.

Private schools have become increasingly popular over the years due to their perceived education quality, higher pass rates in SLC exam, use of English as the language of instruction, high levels of care for students, and superior facilities. Available studies and data from Nepal show that private schools do generally perform extremely well in comparison to the public schools in terms of students' academic achievement (Caddell, 2007; Sharma, 2012; Thapa, 2011).

3.2   Financing of School Education

The Nepal government has been allocating more than 16 percent of its total government budget to education since 2006 (CERID, 2008), which is about 3.8 percent of Gross

Domestic Product (GDP). The amount of the total budget allocated to education increased from 13 percent in 2000 to 16 percent in 2013. However, the Government's School Sector Reform Program (SSRP) has clearly indicated the need to raise education expenditure further to 4 percent of GDP—which will equate to 20 percent of the total government budget—in order to achieve the Education for All (EFA) goals and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were adopted by Governments around the world, including Nepal, during World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thiland in 1990, and the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000. Almost 60 percent of the education budget goes to the basic primary education sector, with about 80 percent allocated for teacher salaries and benefits alone (Lohani, 2014; Thapa, 2011).

Public schools are provided with financial resources in the form of grants from the government. The grants provided are distributed to the schools in the form of earmarked funds and block grants which are to be spent according to the School Grants Operation Guidelines (DEO, 2004). Earmarked grants are conditional grants which are to be spent for specific, defined purposes, whereas block grants are spent as decided by the School Management Committee (SMC) based on the School Improvement Plan (SIP), as discussed below. The major earmarked grants are for teachers' salaries and allowances, free text books for primary level students, scholarships, classroom construction, Early Childhood Development (ECD) education and pre-primary classes.

Block grants are classified into two major categories: School Improvement Plan (SIP) grants and Performance grants. SIP grants are dedicated to implementing School Improvement Plans. Amounts allocated to schools are based on enrolment and vary depending on geographical region. According to the Santwona Memorial Academy and

Research Center [SMAERC] (2009), public schools were found to use SIP grants mainly for teachers' salary and developing physical infrastructure since the focus of SIP has been more on developing physical infrastructure rather than on improving quality. However, according to UNESCO (n.d.), SIPs have become more akin to 'shopping lists' without government support, making the process "more or less a farce, as they are prepared and submitted more as a ritual" (p. 47). Performance grants, which are also called reward grants, are provided to schools to sustain improved performance. Schools with high retention rates, high enrolment rates of girls and disadvantaged students, and higher levels of pass percentages on SLC exams are eligible. Schools must submit their SIP, their latest statistical data, a school self-assessment report, a financial audit and annual report to receive a performance grant from the government (CERID, 2005).

Government funding barely covers the costs for educational activities such as libraries, science labs, computers, books, education materials, training and extracurricular activities, so that many public schools also collect tuition fees from their students to cover such costs, even though this contradicts the government's commitment to provide free education to all (CERID, 2005; Thapa, 2011; SMAERC, 2008). Moreover, there are a number of other problems in education financing including absence of bottom-up planning, absence of clear mechanisms for funding from local bodies, limited positive incentives for schools and teachers, lack of proper utilization of funds at the school level, variation in government support by school type, and delays in delivery of funds to schools (CERID, 2005; Lohani, 2014; SMAERC, 2009).

3.3   Education Management

The Ministry of Education (MOE) is the highest level government authority responsible for formulating educational policies and plans, and managing and implementing them across the country through its central, regional, district and local agencies. The Department of Education (DOE) is responsible for overall implementation, supervision and monitoring of formal and non-formal education programs across the country. Major responsibilities of DOE include providing equal access to education, developing quality reforms, improving internal and external efficiencies, and promoting education as a development –friendly venture (Thapa, 2011).

District Education Offices (DEO) work under the DOE with responsibility for planning and implementing educational development activities, including supervision and monitoring of teaching and learning processes in the district. Major responsibilities include preparing and implementing educational development programs in the district in accord with national education plans and policies; supervising Resource Centers and schools, providing professional input to teachers, principals and students; monitoring and evaluating educational progress in the district; preparing annual and periodic statistical reports on schools; establishing new schools and strengthening existing schools; organizing teacher training and workshops and seminars; and conducting district level exams. There are School Supervisors (SS) who work closely with the DEO in carrying out school inspections, monitoring and supervision, and several other functions directly under DEO. Each district is sub-divided into different supervision clusters containing from 3 to 27 schools on the basis of school population and geography. A Resource Centre is established in each cluster under the direction of a Resource Person (RP) responsible

for offering professional support and services to the schools in the cluster. Resource Centers are responsible for supervising, monitoring, evaluating and providing feedback to schools and teachers; collecting, analyzing and disseminating education information; and conducting meetings to enhance education quality. Resource Centers act as a bridge between the DEO and schools.

The Teacher Service Commission (TSC) is mainly responsible for selection, evaluation and promotion of permanent teachers. There are two systems for teacher selection in public schools. Selection, recruitment, and promotion of permanent teachers is done by the Teacher Service Commission (TSC) at the central level. School Management Committees (SMCs) are only authorized to appoint temporary teachers based on the availability of resources because of a shortage of teachers. This has given rise to different categories of teachers in the country. Teachers who are recruited by TSC to government approved teaching positions are permanent teachers. These tenured staff constitute about 40 percent of all public school teachers in the country. Permanent teachers who stand at highest level of the teachers' hierarchy enjoy full government salary and benefits similar to other civil servants, whereas locally appointed teachers are paid lower salaries and have fewer, if any, benefits. Turnover among locally employed teachers is very high (Khanal, 2011). SMCs have full authority over hiring, firing and promotion of locally appointed teachers, including setting their service conditions. However, SMCs have no authority over the permanent teachers recruited and assigned to the school by the TSC, which has made it difficult to make permanent teachers responsible and accountable (UNESCO, n.d.). Most importantly, due to the lack of a professional body for regulating teaching profession and teachers, it is further difficult to make teachers responsible and

accountable in their profession. This becomes more complicated as teachers are organized under different unions as sister organizations of their political parties. Furthermore, appointment and distribution of permanent teachers is not always based on the number of students in a school (UNESCO, n.d.). There is also a contradiction in the government policy with regard to the staffing levels. For example, the education regulation has fixed region wide Student Teacher Ratios (STR) at 50 for the Valley and Terai region, 45 for the Hilly region and 40 for the Mountainous region, but the standard fixed for Teachers Student Ratio (TSR) is 2 teachers for pre-primary, 5 teachers for primary, 4 teachers for lower secondary, and 5 teachers for secondary level.

3.4   School Management Committee

All public and private schools are mandated by law to have a School Management Committee (SMC); however, its role is nominal in private schools (Thapa, 2011; Sharma, 2012) offering more autonomy and freedom to the principals and founders, whereas it has a more active role in managing public schools having greater control and power. The formation of SMCs at public schools begins with selection of four core members who are elected democratically from among the guardians of the students. The law recognizes only parents, sisters, brothers, grand parents or the care taker of the students as guardians. The four members consist of a chairperson and three members and is to include a woman directly elected or chosen through consensus by the guardians of students, one member from among the local intellectuals or educationists, one member from among the school's founders or donors, and one member from among the teachers selected by themselves. The school principal serves as a member secretary, and an appointed member from the local village development committee or municipality acts as an ex-officio member.

SMCs are expected to improve community relations through increasing public participation as well as improve school management and planning, supervision and monitoring, and education quality (Sharma, 2013). Among their major responsibilities, SMCs are authorized to approve the annual school budget; evaluate and appoint school principals, staff and non-permanent teachers; raise and mobilize funding and resources for the school; collaborate with government and non-government agencies for the development of the school; develop school improvement plans; form a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and other sub-committees for academic and infrastructure improvement, and improve community relations. Additionally, SMCs are authorized to create by-laws for better management of resources and academic activities including teachers and staff (Khanal, 2011).

3.5   School Principal

Governance and management of education is primarily undertaken by the Ministry of Education through various agencies under a highly centralized education structure where schools are managed by their headteachers and School Management Committees (SMCs). Whereas the Education Act does not recognize school principal as a separate leadership position but as a teacher, the Education regulation nonetheless has made a provision for school leader popularly known as "headmaster". The Education Regulation, 2010, Rule 93(1) (sixth amendment) states, "There shall be a headmaster in each school to function as the academic and administrative chief of the school" (Nepal Law Commission, 2002, p. 93). The regulation goes on to specify the appointment procedure and functions for principals. Prior to the sixth amendment of the Regulation, the minimum qualification for becoming a principal was same as that for becoming a

teacher, and principals were ineligible for tenure. In 2010, however, the sixth amendment of the Regulation established a minimum qualification for appointment as a secondary school principal as a Master degree in education. The appointment of principal in the public schools is made mainly from among the permanent teachers in the school concerned. The tenure of the principal is five years which can be renewed. Two permanent teachers who have secured the highest marks on the selection criteria set by the education regulation as evaluated by the Teacher Selection Committee (TSC) are recommended to the District Education Office for the appointment to the post of the principal. The TSC consists of chairperson of the SMC, the School Supervisor (SS) who is overseeing the school, the incumbent principal or a senior teacher from the school, and two independent education experts. The TSC can also form an expert group to assist with the selection.

The selection criteria include 25 marks for teaching experience, 15 marks for minimum academic qualification, 10 marks for any additional higher education degree earned beyond minimum academic qualification , 10 marks for teacher training, 2 marks for school management training, 12 marks for student achievement in the subject taught (performance), 12 marks for leadership capacity (5 marks from the evaluation of the DEO, 5 marks from the evaluation of SMC, 2 marks from the evaluation of the teachers), 10 marks for the applicant's proposed school development plan, and 4 marks for presentation of the school development plan. The school development proposal is to analyze the existing situation of the school, identify challenges, and outlines strategies for school improvement.

3.5.1 Role of the School Principal and Issues Concerned Defining the Role

The Education Regulation prescribes 31 different functions and duties for the principal as summarized in Appendix D.   The majority of the functions specified in the Regulation relate to the management role of the principal. With reference to the six leadership dimensions for effective school leadership identified in Table 2.3, three functions relate to goal setting through preparation of the school's yearly, half yearly and monthly school plan and programs. Two functions relate to building school culture by maintaining cooperation among teachers, students and parents, and ensuring a respectful, ethical and disciplined school environment. Two functions relate to teacher support through selecting and recommending teachers to the District Education Office (DEO) for training programs, and assigning jobs and responsibilities to teachers and staff. Besides that, the majority of the functions specified in the Regulation relate to routine management functions such as preparing reports, record keeping and reporting, many of which directly complement the responsibilities of the DEO and SMC. In short, the official expectations for principals place greater emphasis on routine management functions than leadership. The official duties do not highlight the role of the headteacher in creating vision, building community relations, resource mobilization, team building, promoting collaboration, instructional planning and supervision, physical development and setting standards (Niruala, 2002; Hope Nepal, 2005). For example, in a study covering 120 Nepalese secondary schools in three different urban districts, Niraula (2002) found that secondary school principals felt more confident conducting routine administrative work in their schools than they did engaging in leadership activities involving team building, staff development, offering professional support for teachers, improving instruction, and

building community relations. He further found that principals were not usually involved in the areas of instructional management and planning, developing community relations, and providing professional support to teachers because they lacked training in those areas. Scholars have further discussed how the centralization of the education system in Nepal contributes to a lack of autonomy and decision making powers among public school principals (e.g., CERID, 2004; Joshee, 1994; Sharma, 2013).

The official duties specified in the Regulation clearly emphasize management over leadership. Principals necessarily perform other functions in addition to those specified in the Regulation. For example, it is the principal who works as the member secretary for School Management Committee and, most often, many of the functions of the SMCs are delegated to the principal. Similarly, principals implement decisions made by the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and may perform many of its activities as well as those of other school committees. Although there is no clear provision in the Education Act and in the Education Regulation, schools with large numbers of students usually have a principal, a vice principal, department heads, coordinators, and administrative staff and office assistants to assist in managing the school. These are mostly teachers assigned additional responsibilities who are paid allowances from schools' internal resources. Typically, most schools with smaller numbers of students have a principal, teachers, an accountant and a support staff.

There are a number of problems with the official expectations for principals and their working conditions (CERID, 2004). For example, principals are expected to work full time as teachers, which is practically not possible. This would require principals to take a full load of classwork since the Education Act only considers principal to be a teacher

and there are no separate provision made regarding the teaching hours for principals. Even when allowed release time from teaching, principals must work after school hours and from their home to complete most of their tasks. Moreover, principals do not have clear career trajectories conducive to professional growth (Shrestha, 2013), nor are they provided with attractive incentives or rewards (CERID, 2004). Under the current Education Regulation, school principals are entitled to receive a monthly allowance in addition to their teacher's salary, but the allowance amounts to only $5 per month at the secondary level, which is approximately two percent of the average teachers' monthly salary at these levels. Furthermore, rather than leadership qualities, teaching experience and seniority are given the greatest weight in the selection process for principals. Neither are there provisions to recognize leadership training or graduate study in school leadership. There are only limited provisions currently made for in-service training for principals (UNESCO, 2004), although the government aims to make management training mandatory for school managers and school leaders before 2020, as recommended by the School Sector Reform Program (MOE, 2015). At present, the National Centre for Education Development (NCED) provides a month-long in-service Head Teacher (HT) management training for incumbent principals.

Moreover, public school principals in Nepal are not granted the authority to discipline or transfer permanent teachers, but can recommend such actions to the DEO and SMC. Principals do not play an active role in teachers' professional development either, being limited to making recommendations for teacher professional development to the DEO. Furthermore, the official duties as reproduced in Appendix D do not highlight the role of the principal in building community relations, resource mobilization, physical

development and setting standards (Hope Nepal, 2005). The government has introduced

policy reforms and programs in order to improve education quality of public schools by

maximizing community involvement in school management, which necessarily requires

leadership with vision and commitment, but the Education Regulation considers school

leaders more "an administrator than the visionary leader" (CERID, 2004, p. 38).

In a study entitled "Detailed study on headteacher efficacy and school improvement,"

Hope Nepal (2005) made a number of recommendations to the Ministry of Education for

improving school leadership effectiveness in Nepal, including: (a) reducing the teaching

hours for principals to 12 periods per week, which is 2 periods per day; (b) providing

authority to hire, fire and evaluate teachers; (c) providing principals with an

administrative staff or an assistant principal with reduced workload so that the principal

can focus on many other important tasks for school development; and (d) redefining

roles and responsibilities for the principal and the SMC to better cope with emerging

challenges. The study also recommended adopting a system of recruitment that would

give greater weight to leadership qualities than teaching experience and seniority while

selecting principals, and making it mandatory for teachers seeking the principalship to

take a preparation course in school management, administration and supervision.

Despite policy constrains in defining the role and responsibilities of the school leaders,

researchers have identified effective school leadership practices prevalent among outlier

public schools in Nepal which have made significant positive impact in improving

education quality and students' outcomes. Among others, those practices mostly include:

(a) a greater focus on building relations and mobilizing support and action among the

larger school community and outside the school context in order to garner necessary

support for schools; (b) involving and collaborating members of the school community in

decision making and school activities; (c) focusing to academic excellence through

constant supervision of teaching and learning, and by encouraging and motivating

students and teachers through appreciations and rewards; (d) demonstrating highly ethical

behavior, commitment and dedication contributing in having greater trust and respect to

the leadership; (e) and being proactive and innovative in planning and implementing

various school activities without government support, such as initiating income

generating programs to become self-sustaining and also to overcome government

underfunding (CERID, 2004; Hope Nepal, 2005; Mathema & Bista, 2006). Although

studies in effective school leadership are limited in the developing world in general and

Nepal in particular, many of the leadership practices identified above have been well

documented in the effective school leadership literature originating mostly from the

West, which informed the theoretical background for this study.

In a research conducted by CERID (2004) among nine better performing schools in

Nepal to investigate leadership roles of the school principals and their impact on school

effectiveness, it was found that the principals in better performing schools were typically

more proactive, determined and self-driven to improve their schools. The principals were

found to have started innovative and self-initiated strategies for their school improvement

without much, if any, government support. In particular, they were found to be actively

engaged in mobilizing local community and donor agencies for raising funds and in

better managing their schools. Moreover, the principals had been able to develop good

relationships with stakeholders that helped develop friendly environments in their

schools, promoting team work and cooperation. Additionally, the principals

demonstrated high levels of ethical behavior, commitment and dedication, which contributed to developing trust and respect from among the stakeholders. With regard to improving education quality, these principals were found to focus on motivating teachers and students with rewards and recognition while regularly monitoring and supervising classes, students and teacher activities.

3.6   School Leadership Challenges in Nepal

Available studies from Nepal identify the challenges faced by public school principals as being similar to those reported by their colleagues in other developing countries as documented by Oplatka (2004), specific concerns including lack of education reforms, lack of adequate funding, centralized control mechanisms, and an absence of encouragement and support for strong school leadership. In their major study on differences in student performance in SLC examinations, Mathema and Bista (2006) found poorly performing schools tended to be characterized by a lack of power and authority for principals, an absence of teacher accountability for and commitment toward student learning, political activism among teachers, including intervention by political parties in hiring, promotion and rewarding of inefficient teachers due to political affiliations, low community support and low parental trust.

More generally, Mathema and Bista (2006) note that public schools in general and particularly those in rural areas usually had to cope with a lack of adequate educational facilities and shortages of trained teachers exacerbated by limited opportunities for in-service training, high teacher turnover and frequent teacher absenteeism. These challenges were amplified by low levels of professional commitment, poor teaching

methods, and low student motivation. Moreover, Mathema and Bista (2006) note that supervision of teaching, teachers' performance management, and monitoring of students' progress in their learning and achievement are the most neglected aspects in the operation of public schools in Nepal. They note that principals are busier managing people and money, rather than leading teaching and learning activities in their schools.

Although local communities became more directly involved in the school management after the adoption of decentralization measures in the 1990s, the Ministry of Education has retained control over human resource management and development, development of curriculum and textbooks, educational planning, and financing, leaving principals and school management committees with little authority over strategically important matters (Sharma, 2013; UNESCO, n.d.). Furthermore, Mathema and Bista (2006) reported an absence of active monitoring and supervision of public schools despite the availability of large numbers of school supervisors, resource persons, subject specialists and training staff employed by the Ministry of Education and its District Education Offices.

According to Shrestha (2013), after the political changes in 1990, the major political parties have become involved with teacher unions and encouraged, even forced, teachers to engage in political activities. In turn, teachers can be protected from disciplinary action by political parties; some are even paid full salaries for minimal professional work. Mathema (2007) claims that teachers' morale and enthusiasm has been affected as a result of such political involvement in the public schools. Political interference of this kind has also damaged the public image and performance of public schools throughout the country. Even the students can become divided politically. The report of Mathema

and Bista (2006) indicated instances where teachers declared loyalty to one or another political party, but not to their headteacher.

Furthermore, many public schools in Nepal lack community support. Despite attempts at reform, there is little or no meaningful involvement of parents in school activities, as most parents remain illiterate and unaware of the benefits of education. Where parents are more aware, they are unlikely to trust low performing schools (CERID, 2002; Mathema & Bista, 2006). Most importantly, critical reviews such as those by Shrestha (2013) and UNESCO (n.d.) raise questions regarding the adequacy of resources provided by the government, which are seen as insufficient to ensure the smooth running of the schools. The number of available teachers for public schools is always in short supply, with most secondary schools not having the necessary subject specialists (Shrestha, 2013). Mathema (2007) claims that teacher morale in most public schools is low as a result of inadequate resources, weak leadership, lack of professional support, and political interference.

3.7   Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the current state of the education system and policies of Nepal concerning public schools. National education policy, the schooling system, school management and financing, principals' roles and responsibilities, and their leadership challenges were discussed. The next chapter presents the research methodology that provided the road map for this study.

Chapter 4

4   **Research Methods**

4.1   Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the research design and methods used in the

study. More specifically, this chapter deals with the recruitment and selection of

participants, data collection methods, and data processing and analysis.

A qualitative research design was chosen as being appropriate to explore and compare the

principals' personal accounts of their knowledge and understanding of their role and

responsibilities. According to Merriam (2009), qualitative research aims to understand

peoples' experiences and the meanings attached to their experiences. It is an inductive

process that focuses on and seeks to interpret descriptive data in the form of words. Snape

and Spencer (2003) further note that qualitative research deals with people's lived

experiences in understanding meaningful events and activities in a given historical and

social context. According to them, people's understandings of their world are shaped by

psychological, social, historical and cultural factors, and qualitative research focuses on

these interconnected aspects of people's lives in search of a more complete

understanding.

This study employed in-depth interviews with selected school principals to gather the

qualitative data for subsequent analysis. Initial results were further explored through

focus group discussions with those selected principals to triangulate and refine findings

and also to gather reflective and retrospective information not elicited through the in-

depth interviews. Ritchie (2003) noted that qualitative research can also apply more than one approach for investigation since each brings out its specific kind of insight to the study. He states that focus group discussions are useful after the in-depth interviews to discuss the issues at a more "strategic" level during reporting.

4.2   Participants

The sources of data were principals of selected public secondary schools in Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC). Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) was considered ideal for this study since it lies in the heart of the capital city where there are relatively more public secondary schools compared to other parts of the country, and some of them are relatively more resourceful than their counterparts in rural areas. The majority of the schools involved in the study had relatively similar infrastructure, teachers, student population with similar lower socio-economic background, and government support system. More specifically, five principals from higher performing schools and five principals from lower performing schools as determined by SLC exam results from 2008 to 2012 constituted the main source of data for this study. Additionally, only those candidates who had at least five years professional experience as a principal in the selected school were invited to participate.

Since this study was intended to explore and compare principals' levels of understanding of their leadership practices, the researcher chose a purposive sampling strategy to select ten principals from among all the secondary public schools within KMC that presented candidates for the SLC examination between 2008 and 2012 inclusively. Scholars

consider non-probability type of purposive sampling as the best strategy for qualitative research (Merriam, 2009; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

A total of 53 secondary public secondary schools located inside KMC were included in the population. The identification of eligible schools within the city was done with help from the District Education Office, Kathmandu. The SLC examination results from 2008 to 2012 were obtained from the Office of the Controller of Examinations (OCE) located in Bhaktapur. For this study, SLC results were considered a valid tool to assess the comparative effectiveness of a secondary school in the context of Nepal. Hence, the higher performing and lower performing schools for this study were determined based on the past five years of SLC exam results. Each school was given a score in accord to its position in SLC exam over the five year period from 2008 to 2012. The sum of each school's score for each of the past five years was used to rank all schools in the population. Candidate schools for the study were then selected from the ranked list. If incumbent school principals failed to satisfy the five-year experience requirement according to available records from District Education Officer, or if a principal declined to participate in the study, the next ranked school was selected, and so forth until the sample frame was filled. Four principals among those initially selected were excluded for not satisfying the experience criterion. An additional four principals declined to participate for various reasons.

Table 4.1 shows all eighteen schools selected for the study, including the eight that were excluded. The 'A' prefix indicates higher ranked schools, 'B' those that were ranked lower, 'D' those whose principals declined to participate, 'N' those who did not respond to the invitation to participate or were otherwise not available, and 'E' those who were

excluded.   Similarly, in the table below, values in the 'AP' (Appeared) column show the numbers of candidates sitting each exam and values in the 'P' (Passed) column show the number of students who passed the exam. As can be seen, the more successful schools presented greater numbers of candidates in each year, reflecting their past successes and continuing popularity.

Table 4-1 School Ranking Based on SLC Results 2008-2012

Rank	Code	2012 AP	P%	2011 AP	P%	2010 AP	P%	2009 AP	P%	2008 AP	P%	Average AP	P%
1	A1	120	95	125	100	137	100.0	119	100.0	121	99.2	124.4	98.8
2	N1	30	100	38	100	19	100.0	20	100.0	18	83.3	25.0	96.7
3	A2	170	88.8	139	97.8	149	95.3	150	98.0	136	96.3	148.8	95.3
4	N2	34	82.4	33	90.9	5	100.0	8	100.0	4	100.0	16.8	94.7
5	E1	63	84.1	79	94.9	70	98.6	79	92.4	69	94.2	72.0	92.8
6	A3	117	88.9	115	93	113	98.2	107	95.3	108	86.1	112.0	92.3
7	A4	166	61.5	161	96.3	151	92.1	106	99.1	113	92.0	139.4	88.2
8	E2	68	75	66	97	48	89.6	31	90.3	35	71.4	49.6	84.7
9	A5	38	89.5	41	80.5	34	100.0	33	97.0	41	41.5	37.4	81.7
45	B5	83	26.5	101	56.4	97	81.4	93	54.8	115	54.8	97.8	54.8
46	D1	56	50	89	46.1	106	61.3	90	67.8	101	42.6	88.4	53.5
47	E4	49	36.7	43	41.9	32	78.1	48	60.4	42	50.0	42.8	53.4
48	B4	25	32	28	32.1	23	82.6	34	73.5	29	41.4	27.8	52.3
49	N3	47	70.2	59	54.2	86	41.9	105	36.2	78	53.8	75.0	51.3
50	E5	21	52.4	24	37.5	14	57.1	14	78.6	26	7.7	19.8	46.7
51	B3	20	25	33	63.6	34	55.9	72	37.5	55	45.5	42.8	45.5
52	B2	55	43.6	63	38.1	74	63.5	59	40.7	65	41.5	63.2	45.5
53	B1	22	31.8	42	23.8	19	57.9	26	23.1	31	58.1	28.0	38.9

AP-Number of students taking the exam, P-Pass percentage.

4.3   Data Collection

The research project used in-depth interview and focus group discussion as data collection methods. Semi-structured open ended interview questions were the primary data generators supplemented by follow-up probes, cues and prompts used as appropriate depending on context and perceived need to explore a topic in greater depth.

Given the unreliability of the postal services in Nepal, before the participants were identified initial contact letters were delivered by the researcher to the office of the sample schools by personally visiting each candidate school selected from the population. Each prospective participant was allowed two days to respond with their decision to participate in the study. Once contact was established and the participants were identified, arrangements were made for three successive meetings with the selected participants. The first meeting helped to develop rapport, informing the participants about the objectives of the study, and obtaining initial informed consent before conducting the interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted during the second visit which was held at an appropriate time and location convenient for the participants. For this study, all the in-depth interviews were conducted in the respective schools of the participants during their working days after school hours. Although all interviews went smoothly, there were few minor interruptions in some cases. The third meeting was for the focus group discussions in which the five principals representing higher performing and lower performing schools met separately. The participants were informed ahead of time about other prospective participants involved in the focus group discussion. The focus group discussions were conducted after the researcher had reviewed the interview records and generated initial summary points and interpretive themes. Although it took some time to arrange the interviews due to election activities in the country at the time and also due to the start of holidays for the Dashain festival, all participants cooperated fully in both the in-depth interviews and focus group sessions. The focus group discussions were conducted in a meeting hall provided by one of the sample schools not included in the study.

All interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in the participants' native language of Nepali. With the permission of participants, all interviews and focus group discussions were recorded using a digital audio recorder. The recordings were later transcribed and translated into English by the researcher. In order to protect the privacy of the participating schools and their principals, each interview participant was assigned a pseudonym and code number of their schools, higher performing schools being represented by Uddhav Shrestha from A1, Dharma Sharma from A2, Shiva Ratna Shakya from A3, Binda Shakya from A4, and Gopal Maharjan from A5 and lower performing schools represented by Laxmi Manandhar from B1, Rita Dhungel from B2, Kamala Pradhan from B3, Dhan Yadav from B4, and Rama Adhikari from B5. The reports, analysis and discussions of the in-depth interviews and focus groups presented below use pseudo names to identify participants to assist understanding and further protect participants' privacy.

4.4   In-depth Interviews

Cohen, Manion and Morrion (2011) state that in-depth interviews are mainly conducted "to explore issues, personal biographies, and what is meaningful to, or valued by, participants, how they feel about particular issues, how they look at particular issues, their attitudes, opinions and emotions" (p. 439). Merriam (2009) notes that researchers should ask open-ended questions that help bring out stories and other descriptive data from the participants. She identifies the following six types of interview questions suitable for in-depth interviews: (a) experience and behavior questions; (b) opinion and values questions; (c) feeling questions; (d) knowledge questions; (e) sensory questions; and (f) demographic questions. Mathers, Fox and Hunn (1998) offered the following

guidelines for conducting in-depth interviews: (a) knowing the objectives of the research; (b) learning the topic guide well; (c) recording interviews for transcription; (d) reassuring participants about confidentiality; (e) asking questions beginning with factual background and then moving gently to more personal questions; (f) avoiding personal biases and personal opinions; (g) using probes to clarify questions and noting to non-verbal cues; (h) transcribing recordings soon after the interviews; and (i) doing analysis, which they report requires about ten hours of time for each hour of interview.

For this study, the researcher followed the guidelines and procedures in planning and conducting in-depth interviews as suggested by Mathers, Fox and Hunn (1998) summarized above. Before conducting the study, the in-depth interview schedule was piloted with two principals other than those selected for the study to help refine both the interview questions and develop the researcher's confidence and skills (Merriam, 2009; Matthers, Fox & Hunn, 1998). The two principals for the pilot study were selected randomly from the population. All the interviews were conducted in Nepali language which made it easier for participants to express themselves openly and clearly.

Participants from higher performing schools appeared more relaxed and passionate while sharing their views and experiences, which often made their interviews last longer than the hour allocated and resulting in longer transcripts than their colleagues from lower performing schools. Participants from higher performing schools spoke at length about their progress and how they had overcame challenges to build their schools to the present state. On the other hand, four participants from lower performing (B1, B2, B4 and B5) appeared rather anxious and less confident, and the responses given were most often short and lacking in details, resulting in shorter transcripts. Moreover, three principals from

lower performing invited their vice-principals during the initial part of the meeting to assist them during the interview process, however, those vice principals did not contribute in transcribed answers except for helping the principals feel relaxed and comfortable during the interviews. Several lower performing principals also asked the researcher for some kind of donation for their schools.

4.4.1   Interview Questions

Semi-structured open ended interview questions were used that mostly related to knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, behaviors and experiences of the participants. A copy of the complete interview protocol is included in Appendix A. This protocol was developed to explore the understandings and perceptions of the selected principals regarding their leadership role and practices. The interview protocol was built around two sets of open ended questions based on the three main research questions:

   (a) What do you see as your main responsibilities as a principal and how do you

         perform the role?

   (b) What are the major challenges you face in this school as a leader?

The first set of questions was designed to address the first and second research questions, and the second set of questions was for the third research question. The first set of questions was intended to invite participants' broad reflections on the role of principals in public secondary schools in Kathmandu, and the way they were performing this role in their schools. The second set of questions concentrated on specific challenges the principals recognized, and how they were seeking to address them in their schools.

Depending on the participants' responses, various pre-scripted probes were used to seek additional information. Specific questions were included to direct discussion toward the six leadership practices identified in the conceptual framework. Unscripted follow-up questions were also asked as appeared appropriate.

The interview questions were reviewed and possible modifications were offered by the thesis supervisory committee to enhance validity. Since the interviews were necessarily conducted in Nepali language, the researcher translated the interview questions into Nepali, and then commissioned a back-translation into English by a professional translator. Both versions were reviewed and verified for accuracy, and modifications and changes were made wherever needed to increase consistency in the interview questions before embarking on data collection. This technique of forward and backward translation is widely used in verifying consistency in cross-cultural research (Cull, Sprangers, Bjordal, Aaronson & Bottomley, 2002).

4.5   Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions (FGD) are a form of group interview which has been found useful in exploring collective views on a topic or major issues from among the people sharing similar background or experiences. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrion (2011), focus group discussion is a form of interaction that helps bring out important information that would not otherwise be possible through individual interviews. Cohen et al.(2011) also consider this useful for triangulating findings from other forms of interviewing. Triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity, particularly in qualitative research (Cambell & Fiske, 1959 as cited by Cohen, Manion &

Morrison, 2011). Mathers, Fox and Hunn (1998) state that focus group discussions are desirable when collecting views from people who exhibit and share common characteristics. They also note that this is a useful method when there is a prospect of eliciting additional insights from a collective discussion.

Cohen et al. (2011) identify the following four issues that should be addressed when planning focus group discussions: (a) deciding the number of focus groups, (b) deciding the size of the group, (c) maintaining homogeneity of the background of the participants, and (d) keeping the discussion open-ended but to the point. Morgan (1988) suggests four to twelve people per group, and further suggests over-recruiting people by 20 percent to allow for people who do not turn up for the discussion (as cited by Cohen et al., 2011).

This study employed two focus groups consisting of the five principals interviewed from higher performing schools and the five principals from lower performing schools. Participants from the two categories were not mixed during the focus group discussions in order to encourage open and candid discussions of the issues, problems and the practices identified in the in-depth interviews. It was anticipated that different sets of issues and challenges would be identified for the higher and lower performing schools, and this was the case.

The focus group discussions concentrated on the major issues developed through initial analysis of the individual in-depth interview transcripts. Both the focus group discussions were also audio-taped for translation and transcription. Each FGD took longer than an hour to complete, and generated longer transcripts than the interviews. It was difficult to get all the participants together for the discussions. Despite several attempts, two

principals (A2 and B3) could not manage to attend the FGDs. Both focus group

discussions were lively, interactive, and offered an opportunity for participants to share

their views of challenges faced and their leadership practices more openly.

4.6   Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is an inductive process which typically involves organizing and

interpreting data to identify meaningful ideas, themes and contrasts represented by

emerging patterns. Cohen et al. (2011) note that qualitative data analysis should abide by

the "fitness for purpose" principle which mainly involves organizing, accounting for, and

seeking to explain the data by noting informative patterns, themes and categories.

According to them, since qualitative data typically come from small samples and tend to

be rich and detailed, researchers must often decide to either present the data "individual

by individual, and then, if desired, to amalgamate key issues emerging across the

individuals, or whether to proceed by working within a largely predetermined analytical

frame of issues that crosses the individual concerned" (p. 539).

Data analysis is an ongoing process that begins once the data become available (Mathers,

Fox, & Hunn, 1998; Merriam, 2009). Baron and Clarke (2006) offer the following six

guidelines for qualitative data analysis: (a) familiarization with the data, (b) generating

initial codes, (c) reading throughout the transcripts to immerse oneself in the data, (d)

reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the report. Mathers,

et al. (1998) offer the following practical guidelines for identifying common themes and

categories for content analysis: (a) writing the name of the theme in the margin of the

text; (b) highlighting the common themes; (c) transferring themes and concepts onto

index cards referenced under each subject; (d) using a matrix to relate a number of key themes to different respondents, and (e) mapping the concepts and themes graphically using a cognitive map or other data display.

For the purpose of this research, qualitative data analysis was done by selecting, categorizing, comparing and interpreting the information obtained from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The analysis of the data was further guided by using the broad leadership dimensions as presented in Table 2.3 to describe, compare and contrast the principals' representations of their knowledge and understandings of the leadership role and their responsibilities.

All the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were translated and transcribed by the researcher for each individual participant separately. The data from each in-depth interview from higher performing school principals generated transcripts that were several pages longer than those from their colleagues from lower performing schools. Most of the participants from higher performing schools were more open and passionate while sharing their experiences than were their colleagues from lower performing schools. Once all the information was collected for each individual participant, the transcripts were coded on the basis of themes developed before organizing information into pre-determined categories from the conceptual framework. Once each participant's data was organized individually, it was compared and contrasted with other participants within the same category, and then across the two categories. Most of the participants' responses were mixed, and the researcher found it necessary to re-read transcripts several times to extract the information needed. This was primarily because principals were not always focused on the specific questions asked and the information provided was not

always complete. Participants from higher performing schools tended to provide more passionate accounts of their history and the hard work they had done in uplifting their schools, whereas participants from lower performing tended to dwell on the challenges they faced. The data were first analyzed on an individual by individual basis with attention given to identifying emerging themes, and later key issues were integrated across the groups as suggested by Cohen et al. (2011) and Stake (1995).

4.7   Principals' Profile-Summary

As described earlier, principals from ten public secondary schools, five from among the higher performing schools and five from among the lower performing schools from KMC were chosen for this study. As shown in Table 4.2 below, most of the principals were in their fifties and almost all had been teaching for more than 30 years. They had all been recruited through the same government procedures, and all were qualified, experienced and trained as per government regulation as discussed in the previous chapter. However, none of the principals had a graduate degree or pre-service training in school leadership and management. All had been principals for five or more years but principals from higher performing schools tended to have been in the leadership role longer than their colleagues from lower performing schools, three having accumulated more than ten years of leadership experience. There were six principals with master's degrees, four principals with bachelor degrees including six with degrees in Education. All the principals had been in regular teaching posts at their schools prior to assuming their current leadership position. Similarly, most of the principals had worked as assistant principals in the same schools prior to assuming their current leadership position. All principals from higher performing schools regularly engaged in teaching in addition to

taking care of their leadership responsibilities, but fewer (2 of 5) principals from lower performing schools did this. All had completed their in-service Head Teacher Training (HTT) and all had also undertaken Teacher Professional Development (TPD) training provided by the National Centre for Educational Development (NCED), which is responsible for human resource development in education. However, none of the participants considered this training as relevant to their context, regarding it as overly theoretical.

Five of the ten participants were male and five female-four participants from higher performing schools were male and four participants from lower performing were females. Most of the principals from higher performing schools expressed disappointment over what they saw as a lack of recognition and appreciation from the government for their accomplishments. Furthermore, from the interviews it was found that all of the five higher performing schools had struggled in the past due to lack of infrastructure, financial resources and poor academic performance, whereas all the five lower performing schools had achieved better performance records in the past. Two of the five lower performing schools (B4 and B5) had even received academic excellence awards in the past. Indeed, one of the schools (B4) was the very first public school established in the country which carried especial historical significance.

Table 4.2 Principals' Profile

Components/Schools	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	B1	B 2	B 3	B 4	B 5
Gender	M	M	M	F	M	F	F	F	M	F
Age	59	60	60	59	45	56	55	57	56	60
Academic Qualifications	MSc	MA BEd	MEd	MEd	BSc BEd	BEd	BA	BEd	MEd	MA
Subject Background	Sc	Edu	Edu	Ed	Math	Ed	Arts	Arts	Ed	Arts
Work Experience in teaching (yrs.)	40	37	34	35	22	39	38	37	38	35
Experience as School Leader (yrs.)	33	18	8	25	5	5	6	14	5	6
Training	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Promotion	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y

Y-Received, N-Not received

4.8   Schools' Profile-Summary

All the participating schools were from among the government funded public secondary

schools in Kathmandu Metro City (KMC), and shared similar contexts in terms of

students' home background, teachers, infrastructure, and government support.

Kathmandu has higher number of public schools compared to other parts of the country

and many of these schools are relatively more successful since they are located at the

heart of the capital city having greater influence and access to resources than their

counterparts in rural areas. However, public schools in urban centers like Kathmandu do

not receive students from families with high socio-economic backgrounds that are

permanent residents of the city, who choose private schools due to the social prestige and

also due to perceived education quality (Bhatta & Budhathoki, 2013; Shrestha, 2014).

These public schools receive students mostly from poorer families and from the migrant

population whose family members are often illiterate (Bhatta & Budhathoki, 2013; Shrestha, 2014; Subedi, Shrestha, Maharjan, & Suvedi, 2013).

Except for one school (B3), all principals considered their schools had sufficient spaces, buildings and infrastructure. In the past five years, the number of students in the higher performing schools included in this study had steadily increased, with the number of students in lower performance schools decreasing. The number of students in higher performing schools often exceeded their official capacity, mainly because parents and students preferred higher performing schools due to their higher academic performance. Because of the increasing number of students, most higher performing schools were faced with problems of finding additional classrooms, additional teachers and other necessary resources. On the other hand, principals of the lower performing schools were often worried about possible mergers of their school with another or outright closure, despite most having sufficient infrastructure in place.

Because the number of teachers authorized under government staffing rules was considered insufficient to effectively deal with the increased enrolments in some higher performing schools, they recruited additional non-permanent teachers and met their salaries from the schools' internal resources, primarily through collecting nominal tuition fees from their students and also from generous donations received from the community. All the lower performing schools had smaller numbers of students, but a higher ratio of government funded, permanent teachers. As can be seen from Table 4.3 given below, the overall teacher to student ratio (both government funded permanent teachers and non-permanent locally funded teachers) was 1:10 in lower performing schools, whereas it

was 1:48 in higher performing schools which clearly shows problems over government policy in teacher allocation discussed above in Chapter Three.

All of the schools except B3 were quite rich in infrastructure. They had enough student spaces, large concrete buildings, furniture, classrooms, halls, labs, libraries, drinking water, toilets, and playing fields. Only two schools (B1 and B3) did not have a playground. Some of the schools (A4, B2, B4, and B5) even leased their unused space to generate additional funds. All higher performing schools had more buildings and infrastructure than the lower performing schools. Most of the buildings and other assets belonging to higher performing schools had been developed in recent years with support from the government, donor agencies, and from their communities. All of the lower performing school buildings and infrastructure were in generally poor condition due to lack of proper maintenance.

Some of the higher performing schools had received several education excellence awards and prizes from the government and from social organizations for their academic performances on the SLC examinations. Four principals from higher performing schools (A1, A2, A3, and A4) reported having students who had previously attended private schools but had switched to their schools due to the quality of education. Interestingly, though, many of the principals independently shared their observation that many families in their community sent boys to private schools and girls to the public schools.

Table 4.3 Schools' Profile

Components/Schools	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	B1	B 2	B 3	B 4	B 5
Year of Establishment	1970	1963	1948	1960	1945	1990	1946	1956	1892	1947
Buildings	4	5	3	6	6	2	6	3	2	3
Classrooms	41	62	42	54	48	22	40	22	33	30
Playing field	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
Halls/Auditorium	1	1	1	1	1	N	2	N	1	1
Computer Lab	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Science Lab	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N
Library	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Drinking water	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Toilets	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
No. of total teachers	51	78	67	79	45	17	28	21	25	39
No. of support staff	7	12	5	13	6	2	4	2	4	5
No. of internally managed teachers	21	40	21	53	20	0	2	0	3	3
Current number of students	1920	1980	1450	2100	850	150	460	190	250	430
No. of students before 5 years	1400	1150	900	1800	300	370	800	680	450	780
Average pass % in SLC (past 5 years)	98.8	95.3	92.3	88.2	81.7	54.8	52.3	45.5	45.5	38.9
Best School Awards	4	3	1	N	N	N	N	N	N	N

Y- indicates the availability/received; N-indicates non-availability/not received

4.9   Ethical Considerations

Ethical concerns are important in any kind of research, especially research involving

human participants. This research was guided by the Tri-Council Policy Statement II

(TCPS II) guidelines for ethical conduct of research involving humans. Prior to

conducting the research, ethical approval was obtained from the Non-Medical Ethics

Board at University of Western Ontario, Canada. The Certificate of Approval is included

in Appendix C. Participants were duly informed about the objectives of the study and the

procedures for conducting interviews using the Letter of Information included in

Appendix B. Informed consent was obtained from all participating school principals

before collecting the data. Participants were informed of their right not to participate in

the research, or to withdraw from the research once it had started. In order to maintain participants' rights to confidentiality and privacy, the identity of the participants in the reports that follow has been protected by substitution replacement names. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym and code number for their schools, higher performing schools being represented by Uddhav Shrestha from A1, Dharma Sharma from A2, Shiva Ratna Shakya from A3, Binda Shakya from A4, and Gopal Maharjan from A5 and lower performing schools represented by Laxmi Manandhar from B1, Rita Dhungel from B2, Kamala Pradhan from B3, Dhan Yadav from B4, and Rama Adhikari from B5.

4.10   Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology and procedures used to investigate the understandings and practices of the ten school principals studied, and their accounts of the challenges they faced in their work. The chapter described the selection of participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis, concluding with an overview of the characteristics of the ten schools and principals selected for the study. Chapter five presents an analysis of the results under the six leadership dimensions of effective school leadership and, to begin, the challenges reported by the principals.

Chapter 5

5   **Analysis and Findings**

5.1   Introduction

The first part of this chapter discusses the responses participating principals gave to the

question in the interview schedule asking them to identify the major challenges they

faced at their schools. The second part presents an analysis of the principals' responses to

the interview questions designed to probe understandings of their roles and

responsibilities with reference to the dimensions of school leadership identified in the

conceptual framework given in Table 2.3. Although the question asking participants to

identify the leadership challenges they faced was asked toward the end of the interview,

the chapter opens with discussions of their responses to this question because I reasoned

an understanding of the challenges faced by the school principals in Katmandu would

help readers better appreciate their responses to the interview questions probing their

understandings of their role as school leaders.

5.2   Challenges

The major challenges identified in the interviews were classified under the following

eight headings: (a) poor socio-economic background of students, (b) political

interventions, (c) inappropriate government policies, (d) lack of community support and

declining student enrollment, (e) scarce resources, (f) lack of supervision and monitoring

from the government agencies, (g) lack of professionalism and motivation among

teachers , and (h) private schools. Participants endorsed the above eight categories as

their challenges during the focus group discussion sessions too. However, they had different opinions on the extent of the problems in some categories.

5.2.1 Poor Socio-Economic Background of Students

All of the ten participants considered the poor socio -economic background of their students to be a challenge since public schools in urban centers like Kathmandu receive students mostly from poorer families and from migrant families which are often illiterate (Bhatta & Budhathoki, 2013; Shrestha, 2014; Subedi, Shrestha, Maharjan & Suvedi, 2013). Despite this, the five participants from higher performing schools did not consider this had a major effect on student learning in their schools, each sharing their strong conviction that all children have an ability to learn irrespective of their home background. For example, Gopal Maharjan (A5), the youngest participant from among the higher performing schools, summarized this challenge as follows:

> I believe he/she [students] can learn and progress irrespective of his/her economic or social background. I do not believe that a student cannot progress simply because he/she comes from a poor family. I know all can learn. Some may learn fast while others learn slowly, but all have an ability to learn… I strongly believe that any student can succeed irrespective his/her socio economic background because all children are gifted. I make a point to help those weak students in best possible ways so that she/he can succeed. I know there are students who learn slow but they can equally succeed provided necessary support and constant motivation. I have had example where we were able to help very weak students succeed at this school.

Although all of the ten participants accepted the fact that most of their students came from poor families, it was mostly participants from lower performing schools who made direct reference to the effects of the low socio-economic background of their students on their academic performance as is evidenced by the response from Kamala Pradhan (B3): "It is very difficult to improve academic standards since our students mostly come from poor families facing a number of problems including lack of supervision at home." Participants pointed out a number of specific problems under this heading including insufficient time and resources among their students for studies, malnutrition, poor personal hygiene, and lack of supervision and guidance at home. Moreover, almost all of the principals pointed out that the domestic circumstances of most of their students' limited access to effective supervision of their homework as their parents and most other family members were often illiterate.

5.2.2   Political Interventions

All the participants appeared to agree that public schools suffered from political influences, especially as teachers were often active in politics due to their affiliations with different political parties, especially after the beginning of multi-party system following the restoration of democracy in 1990. Statements from the interview transcripts from the lower performing participants strongly indicated that their teachers were divided by different political ideologies which impacted negatively on teaching and learning which is highlighted by the following response from Rama Adhikari (B5):

> We have teachers mostly involved in politics. We have political groups [political
>
> parties] those who come from outside and they even try to involve students into
>
> politics. These political groups have created division among students itself which
>
> is not good and these activities have spoiled the academic environment. I know
>
> the leadership has to be effective to manage this kinds of situation. I try my best
>
> to manage all these but there comes a time when one is completely helpless…
>
> There was huge political pressure to recruit teachers recommended by the
>
> political parties. Political parties want someone who is their followers and one
>
> who advocates their ideology.

According to Shrestha (2013) involvement of teachers in politics has become a threat to

the public education system in general. Statements from the interview transcripts from

participants from lower performing portrayed some teachers as being more involved in

politics than teaching, with negative effects on school culture, student performance,

teacher selection, and forming and securing support from the school management

committees (SMCs).

Forming and ensuring the effective operation of a SMC, which is representative of the

community, and hiring competent teachers are both challenging tasks in themselves

which can be further complicated by political parties seeking to have their own members

appointed. In both interviews and discussion sessions, there was a general agreement

among participants that this was a common problem with all political parties wanting to

influence teacher recruitment and formation of SMCs. In consequence, teachers at some

schools may be more committed to working as party cadres rather than as members of the

school community. This poses a serious challenge to school leadership making a principal's work more challenging.

While all the participants identified political intervention as a widespread and major challenge facing all public schools in Nepal in general, the five participants from higher performing schools were able to outline strategies they used to make politics less intrusive at their schools. Most indicated they had developed a strong professional and academic environment in the school with full support from their SMCs, which made it almost impossible for teachers to engage in politics to the detriment of teaching and learning. Moreover, each said they were not themselves involved in political activities. A typical response given below by Binda Shakya (A4) who served as a school leader for more than twenty years illustrates this point more clearly:

> I do not have political pressures. I am myself not affiliated to any political parties so I am able to get support from all without any political bias. I believe a principal should not involve in any political parties and activities because that creates bad precedence among teachers. People keep asking me about my political affiliation. I say [to] them I am a headteacher, and my affiliation is only with the school.

However, participants from lower performing schools often expressed frustrations during the interviews and their focus group sessions with their inability to restrict what they saw as excessive political intervention from both outside their schools from political parties and from the political activities of teachers inside their schools.

These participants complained about a lack of support and cooperation from both their teachers and SMCs. They considered these excessive political interventions had

contributed to a deterioration of school culture which affected all aspects of the school environment, but especially teaching and learning.

5.2.3 Inappropriate Government Policies

During the individual interview and focus group discussions, all the participants reported problems with the government's school funding policy, teacher recruitment system, provision for forming SMCs, and the lack of an efficient teacher appraisal system. More specifically, all of the principals from higher performing schools stated in their interviews that the government did not provide a sufficient number of teachers. Although the higher performing schools had more government funded teachers than the lower performing schools, participants from higher performing schools expressed their frustrations against the government policy during the discussion session, particularly with regard to how they were forced to recruit extra teachers and staff from their own internal resources. On the other hand, as a result of failures to properly allocate permanent teachers according to the number of students at each school, some principals from lower performing schools actually said they had more teachers than needed for their low student enrolments. A few even considered this to be a problem as stated by Rama Adhikari (B5): "We have more than enough teachers here at this school. This is one reason why teachers engage more on other activities than in teaching."

During the focus group discussions some principals also suggested that not enough competent and smart people were joining the teaching profession because of government underfunding and a lack of employment benefits. The situation has been exacerbated by government policy restricting the number of permanent teaching positions, forcing

schools to rely more heavily on temporary teachers, as discussed in Chapter Three. Laxmi Manandhar (B1) stated in her interview that the government had failed to offer permanent positions for several thousands of teachers who had continued to work as temporary teachers for more than twenty years. This was one of the reasons prompting Dhan Yadav (B4), the only male participant from lower performing schools, to complain that most new teachers enter the profession as a "platform job" until they find something better and leave the profession.

Furthermore, following the decentralization of management in education after 1990, the government has focused on handing over the management of public schools to the community in order to maximize community involvement in the education process. According to the government regulation, only parents or legal guardians of existing students are eligible to serve on a School Management Committee. Many participants identified this as a problem when seeking to recruit educated, interested and motivated community members to their SMCs. In the focus group discussions too, participants shared that most of the students attending public schools in cities such as Kathmandu are migrants from poor families whose elder members are mostly illiterate, making the formation of efficient and effective SMCs even more difficult. In consequence, public schools in Katmandu (and other cities) are often isolated and detached from their own communities. The situation is exacerbated by higher SES families choosing to send their children to private schools, making their parents indifferent to public schools in their neighborhood, in which they had no meaningful involvement. This problem was clearly identified by many of the participants, especially those from lower performing schools, as illustrated by the following response by Rita Dhungel (B2):

These days the government has adopted a policy to handover the management of

the school to the community. However, since there are no students from local

population, creating school management committee has been the problem. At

times, we have to have fake chairperson and committee members because of that.

Moreover, a majority of the principals identified corruption as a serious problem in the

public education sector including lack of positive attitude and support from government

officials to public schools, most appearing indifferent as stated by Uddav Shrestha (A1)

who was going to retire in a month after serving for the longest period as a principal at

his school:

The government officials, school inspectors including DEO, have been involved

in corruption which has contributed [to the] deterioration of quality in public

schools… The government officials are least bothered about the school. Their

work is limited in preparing reports and completing paper works. We have

difficult situation since we do not have any concrete support and positive attitude

towards the public schools among government officials.

Statements in the interview transcripts specifically mentioned "favoritism and nepotism"

in the selection of teachers and school leaders. As stated by Laxmi Manandhar (B1), for

example, "Bribery and corruption determines who gets selected and who does not, rather

than capacity of the teachers." Many participants were concerned that this has

discouraged many teachers and principals. Moreover, most principals complained that

government planning was overly top-down with insufficient regard to the voices of

teachers and principals. There appeared to be general agreement in the focus group

discussions that the government should consult teachers and principals regularly when formulating educational policies and developing plans affecting schools. Moreover, participants, mainly from higher performing schools, also complained about a lack of proper incentives and recognition from the government, expressing dissatisfaction regarding the lack of encouragement and rewards to the principals and teachers who contributed significantly to student success.

Interestingly, one of the more experienced and popular principals from among the higher performing schools who had 18 years of leadership role, Dharma Sharma (A2), observed that a principal should defy government rules that impeded good school leadership and instruction. Mr. Sharma was very open during the interview session and he expressed his views and dissatisfaction very strongly:

> …there are several government policies that go against the interest of the public schools. Therefore, I assume that when the intention is good, you could still navigate through the regulations. For me, when you do not have good intention, following the rules and regulations alone does not bring positive result.

This appeared to be a widely shared view since all the principals from higher performing schools had adopted their own internal school policies to attract parents and help students do better ignoring some of the government policies. For example, among others, all the principals from higher performing schools reported collecting tuition fees from their students to address their resource needs which was directly against the government policy. The following response from Shiva Ratna Shakya (A3) illustrates the point:

> The government does not have a policy for collecting tuition fee from students since it's free. However, we collect it as support to the school. Even government officials suggest [to] us how to collect fee from students in such a way that this can't be claimed as tuition fee by law but rather [as] support extended to school.

These views were independently supported by other principals from higher performing schools who talked about how they had adopted their own internal school policies to attract parents and help students do better, which ignored various government policies. A majority of the participants suggested that the government should review education policy to improve the distribution of resources, teacher motivation, hiring and firing of teachers, and overall supervision and monitoring.

5.2.4 Lack of Community Support and Declining Student Enrollment

A majority of the principals pointed out that they had relatively fewer students from higher socio-economic families, implying a lack of community support, or even interest, in their school. According to Bhatta and Budhathoki (2013), students from families with good socio-economic background and from those that are permanent residents of the city choose private schools due to the social prestige and also due to higher quality education. These participants stated most of their students were from the poor migrant population which is consistent with the findings reported by Bhatta and Budhathoki (2013) and Subedi, Shrestha, Maharjan, & Suvedi (2013). These participants explained that many of the children from the local community attended private English medium schools indicating a lack of interest among the local community towards public schools as summarized by Rita Dhungel (B2) :

I know there are many schools which have done well after transferring the

management of the school to the community, especially in the rural areas because

the children of the local parents study in those schools. This brings ownership

among the communities and makes them responsible because their own children

are studying in those schools. Even few schools in Kathmandu have been doing

well. But most of these kinds of schools in cities have not been doing well

because they do not see students from local community. For example, our school

does not have students from the local community, and therefore the local

community does not care about the school. Even our SMC chairperson is not from

our local community.

During the group discussions all of the ten principals recognized that the declining

number of students in public schools in general was mainly due to a lack of public

confidence and trust in the public education system. However, none of the five principals

from higher performing schools identified this as a serious problem at their own schools.

Instead, they reported having some students from beyond their local neighborhood, and

two principals, Uddav Shrestha (A1) and Dharma Sharma (A2) even proudly shared in

their interviews that they had several students who had quit private schools to join their

schools due to higher quality of education.

Overall, lack of community support appeared more apparent and acute in the lower

performing schools, participants from those schools reporting significant reductions in

student enrollment in recent years. The five principals of the lower performing schools

linked declining enrolments at their schools to declining confidence in their schools

among the parents and the community. Interestingly, the school profiles show that a

majority of the lower performing schools were among the oldest schools in the country, some with glorious histories. These schools had nonetheless experienced significant reductions in enrollments in recent years, which posed serious challenges to their very existence as described by Kamala Pradhan (B3) and Rita Dhungel (B2) who recalled the closure of several community schools in the recent past. In contrast, participants from higher performing schools appeared rather overwhelmed by the growing number of students at their schools, and these principals reported having good community support and cooperative SMCs.

5.2.5   Scarce Resources

Almost all participants reported a lack of adequate resources in their schools, and they all pointed to insufficient funding provided by the government, which affected smooth operations of their schools. Such complaints could likely be heard in public schools worldwide, especially in developing nations, but these principals from KMC painted a picture of chronic underfunding. This was aptly summarized by Kamala Pradhan (B3):

> We do not get any extra funding from the government except for teachers' salary and some nominal amount for miscellaneous purpose. We have to manage the cost of day to day operation including electricity, telephone, water supply and many others.

Khaniya and Kiernan (1994) claim that "all the problems in education are closely linked to the problem of finance. If quality is the issue then there will have to be increased investment in non-salary categories if any significant qualitative gains are to be achieved."(p. 4067). This seems to be true for the study schools given that almost all

principals pointed to a lack of resources seriously limiting meaningful education activities. More specifically, principals from higher performing schools shared their difficulties in building additional classrooms, infrastructure and recruiting the additional teachers needed to manage increasing numbers of students, whereas principals from lower performing schools were more concerned with maintenance of their old buildings and in upgrading their existing infrastructure. Moreover, almost half of the principals, mostly from lower performing schools, even reported difficulties in maintaining the day to day operations of their schools due to a lack of financial resources. Other statements from a majority of the principals complained of a lack of the resources necessary for teaching and learning, including those necessary for teachers to teach effectively. Many deplored the negative effects of their inability to obtain needed resources on teaching and learning, as aptly summarized by Kamala Pradhan (B3) who headed one of the poorest schools from among the lower performing schools:

> The most obvious challenge is the lack of financial resources. When we cannot provide necessary resources needed for teachers that becomes a major problem. This is where teachers fail to have respect for their leadership, and they keep complaining all the time. It's like looking for quality without providing necessary resources for teachers to work smartly.

5.2.6 Lack of Supervision and Monitoring from Government Agencies

Most principals said that supervision and monitoring by the government was very weak, and reported no or very little government supervision of their schools. Mathema and Bista (2006) note that supervision of teaching, teachers' performance management, and

monitoring of students' progress in their learning and achievement are the most neglected aspects of public schooling in Nepal. According to Mathema (2007), "there has been total absence of support for monitoring and supervision of public schools despite the fact that the Ministry of Education on its payroll has an army of school supervisors, resource specialists, and training staff" (p. 52). Many of the participating principals appeared to believe that school inspectors, resource persons and the district education officer were not performing their jobs responsibly; four of the ten principals saying their schools hadn't been properly supervised or inspected for a long time. Moreover, participants, mostly from lower performing schools, explained they lacked the ability to supervise everything in their schools due to lack of specialist expertise: "The government expects the head teachers to do all the supervisory and monitoring work, which is technically not possible because a principal does not have the expertise to evaluate teaching and learning in all subjects (Dhan Yadav, B4)." Furthermore, the challenge of disciplining inefficient and underperforming teachers was acknowledged by all principals, but there was also general agreement this could be hugely complicated by political interference and a lack of government support. In such situations a principal's effectiveness in supervision and monitoring is necessarily limited.

5.2.7 Lack of Professionalism and Motivation in Teachers

Reviewing the statements from the interview transcripts, while it was generally accepted most teachers were competent and qualified, most participants from lower performing schools were not satisfied with their teachers' performance, many feeling that their teachers needed to be more professional and cooperative and to place a greater focus on student learning. This was illustrated by Rama Adhikari(B5) when she stated:

Although, teachers are friendly and cooperative on personal level, I did not find

them cooperative on professional ground. I have found that teachers do not take

their teaching job seriously and they aren't fully responsible. I do not see them

being honest to their job.

All principals from lower performing schools made some mention of how a lack of

responsibility and accountability among their teachers contributed to high dropout and

failure rates on SLC exams at their schools. Such a view was also echoed in statements

from participants from higher performing schools including Shiva Ratna Shakya (A3),

who painted a chronic picture of poorly motivated and unprofessional teachers in all

public schools in Nepal: "Despite most teachers being trained at public schools, there has

been no proper use of their professional training and the greatest challenge for public

school principals is to motivate them." Shrestha (2013) also noted a lack of

accountability among teachers has been a serious problem for all public schools in Nepal.

According to Mathema (2007), lower teacher motivation is mainly due to the absence of

professional support, excessive politicization, weak school leadership and management

including a shortage of resources. Moreover, the secure nature of the job combined with

a lack of responsibility and accountability among teachers appeared to have had the

greatest negative effect among poorly performing schools, such as those schools in lower

performing as illustrated by the following statement from Dhan Yadav (B4):

In public schools, teachers' job is secure as per the law. Nepal government has

given   as much rights to the teachers as demanded. However, it is my belief that

when people have security of their job, and once they have everything they want,

they don't tend to follow the leadership. They begin to challenge the leadership

as they do not have any fear. I do not know how this attitude has developed

among teachers. This attitude has not only hindered the progress of schools but of

several government sectors.

In sharp contrast, all participants from higher performing schools described their teachers

as being responsible and accountable, and all acknowledged their teachers' important

contributions to the success of their schools

Furthermore, almost all of the principals interviewed complained it was almost

impossible to discipline or terminate an inefficient teacher who had secured a permanent

position through a government appointment, due to political reasons and fear of

interference from a teacher's political affiliations. Complaints were also voiced about the

cumbersome process involved. This may be the reason why none of the participants

reported disciplining or terminating inefficient teachers, except for the principal of school

A4 who simply referred to initiating a transfer of an incompetent teacher who had failed

to mend his ways despite frequent interventions.

5.2.8 Private Schools

All participants identified private schools to be a challenge with their schools operating

under intense competition from private schools in their vicinity, the concentration and

expansion of private schools being very high in Kathmandu (Bhatta & Budhathoki,

2013). But it was mostly the principals from lower performing schools who explicitly

blamed private schools for the declining numbers of students at their own schools. A

majority of all the principals indicated the presence of private schools was pervasive and

that they attracted increasing numbers of students away from public schools due to

parents generally viewing them as better than public schools, but also due to the availability of large numbers of relatively low cost private schools. This was summarized by Dhan Yadav (B4) as follows:

> The community people always compare private and public schools. They consider public schools as lower in standard than private schools. Even poor families begin sending their children to private schools once their financial condition improves. That is the reason why we do not have enough numbers of students at public schools.

During the focus group discussions, many principals also stated that in addition to education quality, the attractions of private schools included English-language instruction, superior infrastructure and facilities, and various extra/co-curricular activities. In this respect, a majority of the principals especially noted that their teachers sent their own children to private schools, indicating a lack of confidence in and dedication to their own schools, which is consistent with the findings by many scholars including Mathema and Bista (2006) who claim, "In recent years, public schools have been abandoned by politicians, planners, policy -makers, administrators, university professors, businesspersons, schoolteachers, and many other who manage to afford the cost of putting their children in expensive private schools" (p. 5).

Although all the principals regarded private schools as a challenge during their individual interviews and the group discussions, the five principals from higher performing schools shared strategies they had developed to compete more directly with private schools during their focus group session. These included the introduction of English-language

instruction, Early Childhood Development (ECD) classes, improving cleanliness and personal hygiene among students, introduction of school uniforms, as well as other initiatives intended to make their schools more similar to private schools. In sum, while all principals identified private schools as a challenge, principals of the higher performing schools were able to describe and discuss steps they had taken to respond to the challenge, whereas principals in the lower performing schools did not do this. In essence, there are grounds for seeing competition from private schools as having contributed to higher performing schools becoming more effective, which was not the case for lower performing schools.

5.2.9 Summary

Despite most of the leadership challenges identified by the principals being common among the participating schools, principals from lower performing schools described and discussed these challenges in ways that conveyed the impression that these challenges were having a more deleterious effect on their schools. Although all participants accepted the fact that most of their students came from poor families, the principals from higher performing schools stated that the socio-economic background of their students did not have significant impact on their learning, while principals from lower performing schools expressed an opposite view. All of the principals identified problems with resources, facilities and infrastructure. Political intervention in schools was identified as having negative impacts in most of the schools, but principals from higher performing schools appeared better able to manage and control such interventions. All participants pointed out problems with government programs, supervision and monitoring, and the support system. A lack of community support and declining student enrollments were

consistently cited as major problems for the schools in lower performing. Poor

professionalism and lack of dedication among teachers in lower performing schools were

also identified as a persuasive challenge that had a negative effect on the academic

performance of their students, and further contributed in undermining community

support. Private schools were regarded as a major challenge by all principals, but

whereas principals of lower performing schools blamed them for dwindling enrollments

in their schools, principals from higher performing schools all gave examples of school

programs and policies they had implemented to better compete with private schools.

5.3   Principals' Understanding and Practices of Their Leadership Role

This section presents the analysis of participant responses to the first major interview

question which asked them to identify responsibilities of a principal and how they were

performing their leadership roles.

Based on the statements in the interview transcripts, the participants identified a total of

39 discrete tasks performed by principals. Of these, 15 tasks were identified as

management activities, 10 tasks were focused on building school culture, 7 supporting

teachers and students, 3 in promoting continuous improvement, and only 2 in each of

areas of visioning and goal setting and developing teachers. As discussed in Chapter

Three, school leaders do have major responsibilities in the areas of managing people and

resources and, in general, participants appeared to be more open and comfortable when

discussing their roles as school managers.

As shown by the tallies in Appendix E, principals from higher performing schools were

coded as identifying more discrete tasks and responsibilities than were their colleagues

from lower performing schools. Overall, the five principals from higher performing

schools were found to have identified an average of 34 specific responsibilities, whereas

those from lower performing schools identified an average of 16 responsibilities,

approximately half as many. When the specific responsibilities identified in the

transcripts were classified under the six leadership dimensions from the conceptual

framework, principals of lower performing schools were found to have identified, on

average, fewer specific responsibilities in each leadership dimension, as shown in Table

5.2.

Table5.2 Average counts of principals' jobs and responsibilities for the six dimensions.

Ite m No.	Jobs/ Responsibilities	Number of Tasks Identified in Interview Transcripts												
		A 1	A 2	A 3	A 4	A 5	Avera ge of A	B 1	B 2	B 3	B 4	B 5	Avera ge of B	Total tasks
1	Visioning and goal setting	1	1	2	2	1	1.4	1	0	1	1	0	0.6	2
2	Building positive school culture	7	9	7	7	8	7.6	4	4	4	5	4	4.2	10
3	Supporting teachers and students to improve learning	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	2	1	4	2	3	7
4	Cultivating leadership qualities in others	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	1.2	2
5	Managing school resources and operation	11	14	14	13	13	13	8	6	4	7	4	5.8	15
6	Promoting continuous instructional and organizational improvement	3	3	3	2	3	2.8	1	1	1	1	1	1	3
	Grand Total	31	36	35	33	34	33.8	21	14	13	19	12	15.8	39

The responses of principals from higher performing schools also appeared to be spontaneous and at times almost passionate, while responses from principals of lower performing schools typically appeared less confident, some appearing somewhat nervous and lacking in the motivation and zeal characteristic of the principals from higher performing schools. Overall, participants from higher performing schools had more to say about their roles and responsibilities, and they were eager to share their achievements and success stories, whereas principals from lower performing schools focused more on describing their challenges and problems. While describing the principals' roles and responsibilities, participants, especially from the higher performing schools, often discussed their experiences and practices as school leaders. Most of the principals from lower performing schools had relatively little to share about their experiences as principals, even in response to specific probes.

Statements in the transcripts from the interviews and focus group discussions are compared and contrasted below under the thematic headings based on the leadership dimensions given in Table 2.3, namely (a) vision and goal setting, (b) building positive school culture, (c) supporting teachers and students to improve learning, (d) cultivating leadership qualities in others, (e) managing school resources and operation, and (f) leading for continuous instructional and organizational improvement.

5.3.1 Visioning and Goal Setting

Although all participants talked about desired improvements in their school, most did not express a clearly defined vision for their schools, nor did those that did explain how the vision was created. This might be part of the reason why none of the schools had a vision

statement displayed or available for viewing. For example, in response to the interview

question on visioning, Binda Shakya (A4) stated, "Vision comes as you begin working.

When you see a problem, you begin to think for ways to solve it."

Despite the fact that creating vision is not an official expected function of a principal,

participants from higher performing schools nonetheless appeared passionate about their

vision such as turning their schools into a "center of academic excellence" or into a

"model school" even though it appeared that the visions expressed were more of a

personal desire than an organizational vision as is evident from the following response:

"I had no clear vision but I had thought to make it a model school. I did not have clearly

stated vision. I believed that with the support from the stake holders, a school can be

developed." On the other hand, several participants, especially from lower performing

schools, appeared to understand vision and goals as synonymous, often making frequent

reference to increasing the number of students as their main vision, for example, Kamala

Pradhan (B3) shared: "Our main vision(goal) is to increase the number of students…I

fear if the student number keeps declining , there will be a question on the very existence

of this school in near future."

The participants from higher performing schools made frequent references to planning

and goal setting as an important task, often frequently emphasizing development of their

own "master plan" or "strategic plan" for their schools as illustrated by a typical response

given below by Shiva Ratna Shakya (A3), which was clearly missing from lower

performing schools:

> I developed five years school improvement strategic plan. It was important to
>
> evaluate my own achievements. I developed it with participation of teachers,
>
> parents, guardians, and SMC, and I was successful in achieving most except one.

A majority of the participants from higher performing schools discussed curricular goals set by their teachers despite the fact that their major school goals were focused mostly on infrastructure development. However, only few participants mentioned systematic planning, and the manner in which they involved teachers, parents and SMCs in planning, often implying this was mostly done by themselves. Moreover, only a few participants talked about actually reviewing their plans and communicating their plans to stakeholders.

Although School Improvement Plans (SIPs) are mandatory, only one principal, Dhan Yadav(B4), made specific mention of his SIP. Principals typically referred to their "master plan" in preference to the official SIP, which they appeared to treat as a formality which has become "more or less a farce, as they are prepared and submitted more as a ritual required for getting budget rather than planning tools that help run schools more efficiently" (Suwal, 2006, p.6 as cited by UNESCO, n.d.).

In general, the principals made references to infrastructure development, academic improvement and, in some cases, developing community relationships as their major goals during the course of their interviews. More specifically, the goals of the principals from higher performing schools were focused more on infrastructure development and maintaining academic standards, whereas their colleagues from lower performing schools

appeared to be focused more on increasing enrolments and improving community support.

5.3.2 Building a Positive School Culture

I was surprised to discover that, except for one participant, all the principals interviewed had difficulty understanding the concept of school culture. Some made specific reference to cultural programs, particularly dance and music and other club activities. In retrospect, it appears that despite being unfamiliar with theoretical understandings of school culture, the participants appeared to have a good, albeit tentative grasp of how school participants perceive and act as community members and as a team, what they value and celebrate, and what they share. The analysis of the principals' responses to the interview probes on school culture identified relationships with students, teachers, community and other stakeholders, the presence of ceremonies and celebrations, collaboration and teamwork, ethical behavior and transparency, and appreciations and motivation as the major components of their practical conceptions of school culture.

Statements from the interview transcripts showed that all the schools were viewed by their principals as having a friendly atmosphere, the majority of the participants describing their schools as "like a family." Most of the participants from higher performing schools considered their teachers and students could share any concerns openly with them, which helped them understand the needs of their teachers and students. Such a collegial environment was considered "the key for progress" by most of the participants from higher performing schools promoting more effective teaching-learning activities. Moreover, these participants attached higher ideals to the education process,

describing their role as headteacher with phrases such as "teaching is devotion to god and religion," while also indicating they sought to treat their teachers, staff and students with appreciation, positive attitudes, and respect. These participants made frequent references to collegial relationships, team work, collaboration, ethical behavior and transparency, and expressed their appreciation of their teachers and students as the reasons for their school's success.

In contrast, although participants from lower performing schools also considered their schools to be "like a family", they did not portray this as having a positive effect on improving teaching and learning, being more likely to report a lack of responsibility and accountability among teachers. This conforms to findings reported by Mathema (2007) who discussed a clear absence of professionalism and motivation among the majority of the public school teachers to the extent that "even when resources were available, there was no teaching and learning"(p. 52). Indeed, principals of lower performing schools made reference to the fact that attempts at cultivating friendly relationships with their teachers undermined their authority by making teachers reluctant to follow instructions and rules. As stated by Rita Dhungel (B2) from one of the oldest schools in the lower performing schools with glorious history in the past : "I have felt that close friendly relationship is not good. It has been found that when a principal is too close and friendly to teachers, they do not follow the leadership." This view was echoed by all , and Rita Dhungel (B2) in particular even questioned her own leadership approach:

> It may be due to lack of my own leadership quality because I have become
> more lenient. I have realized that headteacher need to be more dominating

administrator. I have not been able to be firm so teachers do not follow my

leadership sincerely at times which is seen from their lack of interest

toward their job and responsibilities."

Moreover, none of the participants mentioned anything about ethical behavior and transparency on part of the principal which was made explicit by their colleagues from higher performing schools.

Besides frequently making reference to poor community relations, participants from lower performing schools also expressed their concerns over declining respect for teachers among their students. This appeared to be less of a concern among participants from higher performing schools, who reported having good community support and cooperative SMCs. In this respect, participants from higher performing schools talked about improving their school safety and security, sanitation, infrastructure and improving cleanliness and personal hygiene among their students as part of the productive school culture which contributed to improving education quality and learning among students. This is illustrated by the following typical response:

I focused on cleanliness and personal hygiene of our students. Similarly, I focused

on improving the cleanliness of the school and offering minimum physical

standards to our students. I felt it important because students get motivated when

they see better clean and better physical facilities. (Binda Shakya, A4)

Principals from higher performing schools made reference to the importance of acting

positively by showing appreciation and giving encouragement to their teachers and

students. These principals stressed their commitment to treating teachers and students fairly and respectfully, and most participants emphasized the importance of treating teachers and students with respect and dignity both during their interviews and in the focus group discussions.

Statements from the interview transcripts from all participants showed that all the schools planned and organized different activities, events and celebrations besides regular classroom activities. There was a general agreement among the participants that these additional activities and ceremonies helped develop collegial and positive school environments.

Most of the principals from higher performing schools made frequent reference to the importance of team work and mutual cooperation in the success of their schools. During the interviews, all principals from higher performing schools described their teachers and School Management Committees as supportive, explaining that cooperation from their teachers and SMCs enabled them to get things done more easily. This was not the case with principals from lower performing schools, most of whom indicated that they were experiencing difficulties in gaining the support and cooperation from the stakeholders, including their teachers, that they believed was necessary to improve academic quality.

5.3.3 Supporting Teachers and Students to Improve Learning

Almost all of the principals mentioned providing support to their teachers and students, but principals from higher performing schools tended to do so in more meaningful ways. Despite having limited government support and constraints over resources, some of the principals from higher performing schools described how they had found ways to motivate teachers and students, and lead them towards academic excellence. For

example, Bindya Shakya(A4), the only female participant from higher performing schools who tended to be quite firm on her leadership approach stated:

> Headteachers should create a friendly and attractive environment for teachers so that they feel motivated to work. Once teachers are motivated, they know what they should do and what are their responsibilities. Even when I am not around, everything keeps going smoothly because we have created an environment. I find teachers always working and dedicated to their work.

Besides providing necessary resources and conditions needed for effective teaching and learning, they emphasized the importance of encouraging and motivating their teachers. Moreover, these participants explicitly made reference to distributing different kinds of monetary benefits to further motivate their teachers, including allowances for additional responsibilities. For example, Shiva Ratna Shakya (A3) proudly shared about how he motivated his teachers through providing various monetary benefits:

> I wanted to ensure that teachers feel secure and happy at their profession at my school. I managed provident fund to temporary teachers from the school. I offer the same amount of provident fund to temporary teachers that the government offers to permanent teachers so that even temporary teachers have something to take back after they retire. Next, I give them RS 35 daily as meal allowance as soon as teachers attends to school. I offer them loan facility to teachers and staff. Secondary level teachers can receive up to one lac, lower secondary up to 75 thousand, primary level up to 50 thousand and other support staff can receive RS 35 thousand as personal loan from the school. Similarly, every two years I offered medical facilities for teachers and staff every two years because most

teachers suffer from a number of aliments which might not be known to them.

All the teachers and staff receive same salary as per the government standard.

Now you tell me, how much a private school can offer?

Participants from lower performing schools, on the other hand, were more focused on how their lack of resources hampered their teachers' motivation.

Although there was no meaningful reference made by participants to instructional support provided to their teachers except for sending teachers to training programs provided by the government, many of the of the participants from higher performing schools discussed how they regularly consulted with their teachers about classroom activities, students' learning, classroom management, reviewing exam results, inspecting student work, and visiting classes, which these principals considered to be crucial in keeping their teachers and students focused on their goals of academic excellence. In contrast, participants from lower performing schools tended to dwell on the lack of government support for teachers' professional development.

All participants made frequent reference to their teachers' professional development activities through training programs such as Teachers' Professional Development (TPD) provided by the Ministry of Education and, in some cases, offered by non-government agencies such as Nepal School Aid. Additionally, several participants from higher performing schools shared how they had organized need-based professional development workshops for teachers in their schools with help from external experts. In contrast, some participants from lower performing schools mentioned their teachers appeared

uninterested in training activities aimed at improving classroom instruction during their

interviews.

Since a majority of their students came mostly from poor family backgrounds, all the

participants distributed government approved scholarships to their needy students.

Besides distributing government approved scholarships, participants from higher

performing schools discussed how they provided additional resources to their students,

including free remedial classes for those who needed additional assistance, regular

interactions with students and their parents and how they made time to encourage their

students: "I believe that a child is a book. We have to be able to read every pages of that

book to learn," said Shiva Ratna Shakya (A3). Most importantly, these participants from

higher performing schools demonstrated strong belief and conviction that all students

have an ability to learn irrespective their home background. On the other hand, besides

making direct reference to the effects of the poor socio-economic background of students

on their academic performance, participants from lower performing schools tended to

point to problems impeding their students, including insufficient time and resources for

study, malnutrition, poor personal hygiene, and a lack of supervision and guidance at

home.

5.3.4 Cultivating Leadership Qualities in Others

Among the participants, only six principals (four from higher performing schools and two

from lower performing schools) responded to the questions probing this dimension of

leadership. Other principals, especially those from lower performing schools, had little to

say in response to these questions. Coded responses to these questions included assigning

teachers to positions of responsibility within the school's organizational structure, involving teachers in decision making, and assigning other additional responsibilities.

Although public schools are not mandated by law to have vice-principals or department heads or any other leadership positions, most of the higher performing schools had vice principals, department heads, and teachers-in-charge or coordinators to assist the principals since they all had large number of students. Most of the lower performing schools with their smaller enrolments had no subordinate positions to which teachers could be assigned to gain leadership experience. Some principals from lower performing schools explicitly stated that they did not need to establish additional leadership positions in their schools because of the small number of students and teachers. Even so, several principals of these schools described how they had assigned tasks such as for organizing school events and celebrations to help their teachers gain experience.

Most participants appeared aware of the need to develop leadership qualities among their teachers in order to run their schools more successfully. As stated by one participant from a higher performing school: "Principal cannot do everything alone. He/she should be able to delegate his works to teachers and staff by taking them into confidence. Principal should be able to get works done from others" (Dharma Sharma, A2). Most participants, mainly from higher performing schools, reported having an assistant headteacher, department heads, and coordinators to assist them in managing their schools, and also to help develop teachers' leadership qualities as noted by Uddav Shrestha (A1): "I have created departments and faculties. We have coordinators for different works. This has helped teachers in developing their leadership qualities. I try to delegate my works to teachers." They further outlined how they involved their assistant headteachers in the

everyday operation of their schools, often delegating responsibility for the school to them while they worked with other stakeholders from outside the school to secure support and resources. This also helped in building relationship adding cohesion in the school improvement efforts as stated by Dhana Sharma (A2): "vice principal and principal should work more closely…I have seen conflicts due to lack of understanding and cooperation between the two in many schools."

Most of the participants, mainly from higher performing schools, discussed how they involved teachers in decision making and distributed responsibilities among teachers to better manage academic and non-academic affairs at their schools. Moreover, since most of these participants had developed their own leadership qualities while working as an assistant headteacher for extended periods prior to taking over headteacher role, they encouraged and supported their current assistant headteachers to developing their leadership abilities in similar manner. Several participants talked about how they focused on identifying individual strengths of their teachers prior to assigning any additional responsibilities.

5.3.5 Managing School Resources and Operations

Participants' responses to questions and probes asking about their role and responsibilities as a manager of the school were coded into three major emergent categories: managing financial and human resources, managing infrastructure and facilities, and managing community support.

There was a broad agreement across the interview transcripts that raising and managing financial resources was one of the principals' major responsibilities. All participants

specifically shared at one time or another that they lacked adequate resources, and all appeared to agree that the government funding was inadequate, even to the extent of not meeting their teachers' salaries. In the course of the interviews and focus group discussions, all principals from higher performing schools explained that they had hired additional teachers and other staff, paid additional benefits to their teachers, and managed operational costs by relying on internally generated funds, and they shared that the chief sources of their internal revenue were donations from the community and student tuition fees, despite the fact that the government has mandated free public school education. Although all the participants reported collecting tuition fees from their students to overcome government underfunding, participants from higher performing schools also reported receiving generous donations from the community at large and from non-government organizations. These participants reported having popular and influential personalities from the community serving on their SMCs in order to garner better community support. As discussed in more detail in the previous chapter, the government does not provide teachers in proportion to the number of students. In consequence, the larger enrolments in higher performing schools created a need for additional teachers and staff including additional classrooms and resources.

Moreover, principals from higher performing schools also talked about how they had taken steps to improve the poor infrastructure they had inherited at their schools. These principals said they had personally supervised the construction and renovation of their schools and led the necessary fund raising activities. These principals appeared to strongly believe that without having proper infrastructure in place, it would be difficult to maintain their school's academic standard and continue to improve education quality.

Most of the principals appeared to agree that without community support it would be impossible to develop their schools. Each of the principals from higher performing schools talked about how they had worked to develop good relations with their community and had been able to encourage the community to take ownership of their schools by involving the community in various school activities. They stressed the importance of maintaining transparency, integrity and academic quality in gaining trust and support from the community. They all acknowledged the generous support they had received from the community for building their new infrastructure and for their overall success. A typical response from one of participant aptly illustrates this point:

> Generally, we have a tendency to believe that due to lack of financial resources, we can't do things. But what I believe is when you have solid plan which is good and justified, and if we are dedicated for it, the community can always come forward to help. The government may not help due to its regulations, official constraints and criteria but support from community can be there. All the schools nationwide can be developed with the help of community support. (Dharma Sharma, A2)

On the other hand, each of the principal from lower performing schools accepted that they lacked a desirable level of support from their community. These participants often complained about unsupportive, indifferent or even hostile communities. Indeed, many of the practical problems faced by principals of lower performing schools appeared to be rooted in or exacerbated by a lack of community support, declining enrolments being a key example.

Although all the participants talked about improving teaching and learning at their schools, participants from higher performing schools appeared more passionate and determined in achieving higher student outcomes. Many of them associated the education process with higher ideals and talked about a commitment to academic excellence and winning national and regional awards for academic achievement. However, the participants' role in instructional management was mostly limited to preparing the academic calendar, time tabling and ensuring teachers attended to their classes. Despite that, most of the participants from higher performing schools offered statements indicating proaction in monitoring and supervising teaching and learning that were absent from the interview transcripts of their counterparts from lower performing schools. According to Mathema (2007), instructional planning and supervision has been the most overlooked aspects in public schools across the country, even though the government has "an army of school supervisors, resource specialties, and training staff" (p. 52).

5.3.6 Leading for Continuous Instructional and Organizational Improvement

It was mostly the participants from higher performing schools who demonstrated a commitment to continuous instructional and organizational improvement through a range of initiatives which included (a) developing plans to pursue goals grounded in their vision for the school, (b) maintaining a clear and sustained focus on promoting academic excellence, (c) devoting continuing attention to improving school infrastructure, (d) restructuring the organization of the school, (e) developing activities and initiatives related to improving school culture, especially with regard to managing conflicts, (f) promoting school identity and cohesion and encouraging teamwork, (g) placing greater focus on communication to stakeholders, and (h) initiating and sustaining activities to

develop and maintain relationships with external stakeholders and developing networks

to connect the school to its wider environment. Besides that, principals from higher

performing schools typically demonstrated greater optimism and determination when

discussing improving their schools, whereas participants from lower performing schools

tended to point mostly to impediments to improvement, frequently blaming teachers,

community and higher authorities for the degraded academic standards and poor

infrastructure. Commenting on the common behavior found in their major research

among lower performing public, Mathema and Bista (2006) in their major nationwide

research report note, "Blaming each other for nonperformance and poor performance

have been traced as a recurring patterns of behavior" (p. 316).

 Rather than exuding optimism, heads of lower performing schools, regarded the

challenge of school improvement as inherently difficult, if not impossible as aptly

illustrated by a typical response from Dhan Yadav (B4): "it is not impossible, but it is too

difficult for a headteacher to change and modernize public schools."

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Moreover, besides maintaining their focus on improving infrastructure and academic

achievement, participants from the higher performing schools discussed new initiatives

they had launched in their schools such as starting pre-schools, adopting English-

language instruction, securing reference materials other than government approved text

books, providing free remedial classes for weaker students, improving cleanliness and

personal hygiene among students, introducing school uniforms as well as other

initiatives to make their schools more similar to private schools.

5.4   Chapter Summary

This chapter included data organization and analysis under major leadership challenges faced by the principals and   their leadership understanding and practices under the six leadership dimensions identified in the literature. The forthcoming chapter provides a summary of the study followed by a summary of the findings, discussion, and implications.

Chapter 6

6   **Summary, Conclusions, Discussion and Implications**

As the final chapter of the study report, this chapter presents a summary of the study and conclusions followed by a discussion of the findings and implications. The first section attempts a quick flashback on the overall study. The second section presents major conclusions in point form. Subsequent sections discuss the findings within the theoretical frame adopted and with reference to related studies, concluding with final reflection including comments on implications policy in Nepal and future academic inquiries.

6.1   Summary of the Study

As is evident from higher failure rates in the School Leaving Certificate examinations, academic standards in the public schools in Nepal have been poor in comparison to those of the growing private school sector, despite increasing investments in school education. Yet, despite operating under similar circumstances in terms of infrastructure, teachers' background and students' socio-economic background, some public secondary schools have been consistently outperforming the majority. It appears plausible to anticipate that differences in school leadership could contribute to these different outcomes. This qualitative study sought to explore this explanation by comparing the understandings of their roles and their leadership practices held by   principals of public secondary schools with higher and lower records on SLC examinations. The study sought answers to the following three research questions:

   (a) How do selected principals describe their role and leadership practices?

(b) How do their accounts relate to the literature on effective school leadership?

(c) What do these principals identify as the major challenges in their job?

From among the secondary public schools in Kathmandu Metro City (KMC), five from among the higher performing schools and five from among the lower performing schools were selected based on the past five years SLC exam results. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions with principals of those schools were used to collect data for this study. The information from the participating principals regarding their leadership understandings and their leadership practices was collected with reference to the following predetermined leadership dimensions derived from an analysis of the leadership literature: (a) vision and goal setting, (b) building school culture, (c) supporting teachers and students, (d) cultivating leadership qualities in others, (e) managing school resources and operations, and (f) leading for continuous instructional and organizational improvement as summarized in Table 2.3. All the interviews and focus group discussions were translated from Nepali to English and transcribed concurrently by the researcher for each individual participant. Once all the information was collected for each individual participant, highlighting and coding was done on the transcripts to identify leadership understandings, leadership practices and challenges described by the participants. Participants' responses for leadership understandings and leadership practices were separately categorized into a series of sub-categories before finally organizing them into the six pre-determined leadership dimensions as listed above and summarized in Table 2.3. Once all the ten participants' data were organized individually, results were compared and contrasted among participants within the schools in the same category, and then across the two categories of schools. Participant reports of

their understandings of leadership and their leadership practices are presented separately to provide a comprehensive picture to readers, and to allow direct comparison between their leadership understandings and their reported practices.

According to Leithwood & Riehl (2003), a school leader has two functions: providing direction and exercising influence. In these times of heightened concern for student learning and higher student academic achievement, school principals are being held accountable for how well teachers teach and how much their students learn. There is a general agreement among scholars that there are strong principals behind better schools and weak principals behind failing schools. How leadership works in higher performing and lower performing schools, and how principals exercise their leadership responsibilities are critical questions around the world, but especially in emergent nations such as Nepal.

6.2   Conclusions

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. All the principals had to deal with political interference, less than fully supportive government policies, poor administrative support from the higher authorities, a lack of financial and other resources, severe at times, and increased competition from mushrooming private schools as their chief challenges.

2. Principals of the higher performing schools considered the increasing enrolments in their schools as a major challenge, whereas the principals from lower performing schools tended to cite declining enrolments, the poor socio-economic background of

students, lack of community support, increasing political intervention, and a lack of professionalism among teachers as their major challenges.

3. Most of the principals did not have clearly defined, documented and shared vision and goal statements for their schools. However, principals from higher-performing schools had developed plans of action to pursue goals focused on improving student achievement and demonstrated their commitment to these goals through their actions, whereas participants from lower-performing schools were unable to clearly state a coherent plan to improve their schools.

4. Participants had little knowledge and understanding of the academic concept of school culture. All principals nonetheless reported that their schools had friendly atmospheres. Principals from higher performing schools discussed and gave examples of the presence of highly productive cultures in their schools and explained how they believed this directly contributed to their school's academic success through building relationships based on trust, professional respect, openness, and ethical behavior.

5. Principals from higher-performing schools discussed the importance of strong team work and collaboration among their teachers, and identified ways in which they shared and distributed leadership among their teachers and staff in order to manage their schools.

6. Principals of the higher performing schools made statements expressing continuing concern for the health and success of their schools and an acceptance of personal responsibility for their schools and their progress. Principals of the lower performing

schools more commonly expressed concern over the success and future of their schools, but tended to dwell on the difficulties they faced and the shortcomings of teachers and other stakeholders.

7. Principals from higher performing schools offered examples of their actions which illustrated proactive attitudes and actions toward managing resources and motivating staff and students. Examples were given of how they motivated and rewarded teachers by providing small loans and extra allowances (food, medical checkup, uniform and extra tutorial classes). Principals from higher performing schools also talked about how they supported students by providing remedial classes, books, supplies, and scholarships. Principals of lower performing schools explained they lacked the internal financial resources to offer such incentives and appeared more concerned with inappropriate and unprofessional behavior among their teachers.

8. All the higher performing schools were described by their principals as supportive work places characterized by team work and high levels of motivation among teachers and staff, which directly contributed to their academic performance. Arrangements were in place in the higher performing schools to support professional and leadership development among the teachers, but this was not the case among lower performing schools.

9. Most of the principals spent most of their time at school managing the financial and human resources. However, the higher performing schools were able to generate additional resources to provide additional benefits for their teachers and staff, provide

better facilities for students, and expand accommodations to cope with their increasing enrolments.

10. Principals from higher performing schools made statements which showed a strong belief in the ability of a principal to bring about positive change in a school, whereas principals from lower performing schools appeared less confident about this. Accounts of their accomplishments reflected principals' beliefs, those from higher performing schools offering examples of how they had worked proactively to gain support from school stakeholders, to build teamwork in their schools, and launch initiatives to improve their schools in various ways, whereas principals from lower performing schools provided far fewer examples of initiatives undertaken, preferring to dwell on the lack of support from teachers, parents, SMCs, DEOs and the community at large.

11. Most importantly, whereas headteachers from higher-performing schools demonstrated strong commitment to the academic success of their schools and students, their colleagues from lower-performing schools appeared overwhelmed by the challenges.

6.3   Discussion

This study explored the leadership challenges, and leadership understandings and practices of the headteachers from five relatively higher- and five lower-performing public secondary schools in Kathmandu Metro City (KMC) with a view to exploring how these headteachers understood their work and responsibilities. The findings are discussed below in three parts in line with the three research questions investigated in this study.

6.3.1   What do these principals identify as the major challenges in their job?

All the principals reported facing problems due to political interference, incompatible government policy, insufficient funding, lack of autonomy and resources, and lack of supervision and monitoring as their common challenges. This is consistent with the findings reported by Oplatka (2004) in the context of developing countries and the observations by scholars from Nepal such as Mathema and Bista (2006), Sharma(2013), Shrestha (2013) and Mathema (2007).   Similar challenges have been reported by other scholars from the developing world such as Yang and Brayman (2010) in China, VSO (2009) in Maldives, and Onderi and Makori (2013) in Kenya, who all identified a lack of support from the government, lack of resources, and lack of parents' involvement and community support.

Among other challenges, headteachers from both higher and lower performing schools in this study frequently highlighted chronic underfunding from the government as being a particularly serious challenge which affected every aspect of their schools including teaching and learning. However, some of the challenges stated by the scholars cited above, such as frequent change of school principals, frequent change of superordinate leadership, increased workload, an over focus on testing, autocratic leadership, drug and substance abuse, sectarian strife and conflict, violence and insecurity were not that prevalent in the view of the head teachers selected for this study. Another discrepancy concerns private schools, which were consistently identified as a challenge by all headteachers in this study, but were not identified by the scholars cited above as constituting a frequently encountered challenge in developing countries. Even so, the growth of low-cost private school alternatives across in the developing world as

documented by Tooley, Bao, Dixon & Merrifield (2011) implies the challenges faced by Nepali principals in this regard are likely to become more common.

Nevertheless, the head teachers from the lower performing schools in this study appeared to be more beset and even overwhelmed with challenges than their counterparts from higher performing schools, as shown by how these principals dwelled on describing their challenges in greater detail during the interviews and in the focus group discussion. These principals frequently deplored the poor or non-existent support from parents and the community, the effects of the poor socio-economic background of students, the declining numbers of students in their schools, political intervention and divisions among staff together with a lack of professionalism and accountability amongst teachers as their key challenges.

All of these issues have been well documented as pervasive in Nepalese public schools by many scholars including Mathema and Bista (2006), Sharma (2013) and Shrestha (2013). In this study, political intervention was found to have severely affected the lower performing schools in many ways including low levels of motivation, responsibility and accountability among teachers, securing active support from School Management Committees and constraining principals from acting independently for the development of their schools. Moreover, parents are highly unlikely to extend their support to schools where teachers are not professional and accountable, where there is excessive political interventions rather than a focus on teaching and learning, and where students are deprived of their right to quality education in a supportive school environment.

6.3.2 How do selected principals describe their role and leadership practices?

As shown by the tallies in Appendix E, most principals identified management activities when discussing their roles as school principals with less attention being given to visioning and goal setting, building school culture, supporting teachers and students, and promoting continuous improvement. In many ways, this is only to be expected given the official duties prescribed for principals in the Education Regulation as summarized in Appendix D and previously discussed in Chapter Three. This is also consistent with findings from similar research within Nepal (e.g., Joshee 1994; Mathema and Bista, 2006; Niraula, 2002) and studies of principals' work in other developing countries (Anderson & Mundy, 2014; Chapman, 2000; Oduro, Dachi, Fertig & Rarieya, 2007; Opltka, 2004).

Specifically, the headteachers identified managing teachers, students and school activities; managing resources; maintaining school records and maintaining discipline and order in school as their major duties and responsibilities. Many of the headteachers also stated that they had to work to maintain a supportive academic environment and healthy relationships with stakeholders. Almost all the headteachers mentioned preparing the official School Improvement Plan as a mere formality as they cannot get funding without submitting the SIP to the DEO. However, principals from higher performing schools typically discussed aspects of their role and identified leadership practices that went beyond their official duties as stated in the government's policy document, some of which contravened the government policy. These included arranging funding for additional expenditure in their schools, including collecting tuition fees, finding sponsors to support needy students, hiring and facilitating the development of additional teachers,

creating positions of additional responsibility, and delegate responsibilities to develop teacher leadership.

6.3.3 How do their accounts relate to the literature on effective school leadership?

Although the emphasis the participating principals placed on routine management does not match the leadership functions identified in the literature as shown in Table 2.3, participants did demonstrated some awareness of the six leadership dimensions adopted as the conceptual framework for the study, those from the higher performing schools providing more extensive evidence of acting in at least broad conformity with the main leadership dimensions, even if they didn't necessarily grasp underlying theoretical concepts, such as school culture.

 Findings provided strong evidence for the presence of the six dimensions of effective leadership practices in the interview responses of headteachers from the higher-performing schools, whereas evidence of such leadership was weak among headteachers from lower-performing schools. More particularly, headteachers of the higher performing schools placed a greater emphasis on and gave greater priority to proactive practices that enabled their schools and empowered their staff and students to succeed in an increasingly competitive environment.

As mentioned above, official education policy of Nepal expects limited planning and goal setting activities by headteachers, who are not officially expected to develop shared vision statements and promote the acceptance of group goals as described by the scholars contributing to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, especially Hallinger & Heck (2002), Leithwood and Riehl (2003) and Clark (2014). Even so, headteachers from higher-

performing schools discussed how they developed plans of action to pursue goals focused on improving student achievement, and talked about their commitment to these goals when discussing their work and achievements.

Sergiovanni (2007) stated that successful schools are characterized by strong and functional cultures with a vision of academic excellence, a view supported by Deal and Peterson (1994), Engels et al. (2008), Firestone and Wilson (1985) and others. In this study too the headteachers from higher-performing schools discussed and gave examples of the presence of a highly productive culture in their schools and explained how they believed this directly contributed to their school's academic success through building relationships based on trust, professional respect, openness, and ethical behavior. On the other hand, headteachers of the lower performing schools provided little if any evidence of the presence of positive and strong school cultures in their schools. According to Mathema and Bista (2006), "Lack of trust and confidence, accountability, and discipline and unclear intents are likely to have made those schools literally 'ineffective'"(p. 316).

Indeed, the interview and focus group discussion transcripts for these participants provided evidence of less than supportive school cultures often characterized by political interference and conflict including unprofessional teachers as explained by the scholars.

Headteachers from higher-performing schools discussed the importance of strong team work and collaboration among their teachers, and identified ways in which they shared and distributed leadership among their teachers and staff in order to lead their schools toward success. Moreover, headteachers from higher-performing schools provided examples of how they had been proactive in supporting and facilitating teachers and

students, and mobilizing and managing resources to overcome constraints imposed by government underfunding. These findings are consistent with the findings reported by Mathema and Bista (2006) about leadership in effective schools in Nepal:

> Head teachers of effective schools are found relatively more stable, firm, confident, and result-oriented. All their time, effort, and energy is geared towards student achievement and positive social image of the school. Such head teachers of high performing schools have won the trust and confidence of other stakeholders, too. (p. 315)

 Most importantly, headteachers from higher-performing schools demonstrated strong commitment to the academic success of their schools and students, whereas their colleagues from lower-performing schools appeared overwhelmed by the very real challenges they faced.

The findings of this study help confirm that the effective school leadership themes and actions consistently identified in the literature are applicable to the challenges of improving schools in developing countries such as Nepal. Moreover, there is an urgent need for the government and other stake holders to recognize school leadership as a key strategy for school improvement, which has remained mostly overlooked based on the findings from this research including the most research available on school leadership from Nepal. Interestingly, this research has further validated the findings reported by Shrestha in 1982 as being still valid (probably the very first research on school leadership conducted in Nepal), "School leadership is one of the most overlooked aspects of the education system in Nepal"(p. 16). Moreover, although the available literature on

leadership effectiveness does not necessarily highlight the importance of securing

resources, this emerged as the central challenge for the participants in this study, all of

whom were faced with the need to generate and mobilize resources to overcome chronic

government underfunding. This would appear to be a school leadership challenge unique

to the developing world (Khaniya & Kiernan, 1994; Mathema & Bista, 2006; Opltaka,

2004; Shrestha, 2008; UNESCO, n.d.).

6.4   Implications

This study was conducted to explore and assess the understanding and enactment of the

leadership role by selected school leaders in Nepal within the context of the challenges

they face. Since the study was focused on school leadership, implications arising from the

study are important for policy, practice and future research.

6.4.1 Implication for Policy and Practice

The study suggests government policy has become a hindrance to the success of the

public schools in Nepal. Many of the challenges identified by participating principals

appear rooted in ineffective or inappropriate government policies implying a pressing

need for a thorough review which would consider improved approaches to encouraging

greater involvement of school and community members in order to make public schools

more competitive. Consideration should also be given to providing greater autonomy,

support and recognition to those schools that have demonstrated better performance and

should extend special support to failing schools. Among other reforms, the lack of

adequate resources due to insufficient funding has become a major challenge which has

severely limited meaningful education activities in public schools across the country. It

is highly unlikely for a school to maintain education quality in the chronic absence of necessary resources. Besides providing funding for basic infrastructure and teachers' salary, government funds should be allocated to directly support instructional management in order to improve education quality and student learning.

Most importantly, the Nepalese government and governments of other developing counties need to re-define the role of head teachers to better meet the expectation of the changing times by shifting emphasis from a management to school and instructional leadership. Serious and sustained consideration should be given to redesigning initial and in-service training programs for headteachers to incorporate leadership practices focused on setting directions, building positive school cultures, team building, building and sustaining relationships, promoting collaboration and participation, and managing instruction. Similarly, both serving and aspiring headteachers in public service should consider focusing their professional efforts on these areas in order to better lead their schools toward success. This appears particularly important given the challenges posed by the growth of low-cost private school alternatives across the developing world (Tooley, Bao, Dixon & Merrifield, 2011). Moreover, there is a clear need for identifying and preparing aspiring school principals through formal pre-service training in school leadership.

One clear ray of hope emerged during the focus group discussion held for headteachers from lower-performing schools. Discussions during this session were animated, and participants were eager to share their desire to participate in more such discussions as a way to improve their professional knowledge and confidence. The participants were particularly interested in being able to interact with and learn from headteachers of more

successful schools, and there was general agreement that opportunities to discuss mutual problems with colleagues in similar circumstances was valuable in itself. Even though the government has management training programs for headteachers (which many of the participants in this study considered ineffective), the benefits of sponsoring less formal opportunities for headteachers to interact professionally should not be overlooked. Four out of the five headteachers from the higher-performing schools in this study were about to retire, effectively removing their expertise and experience from the system. Creating and sustaining opportunities for younger heads to interact with experienced elders after they retire would be a powerful and efficient way to strengthen professional development programs.

Most importantly, greater emphasis should be placed on leadership qualities than seniority and experiences in selection of school principals. The government should focus on selecting principals who demonstrate a strong commitment and a vision for educational excellence. Moreover, the government should offer more autonomy to headteachers from public schools to provide greater parity with headteachers from private schools, and enhance leadership opportunities that promise to increase competitiveness. The selection process for school leaders could be made more competitive and open to attract teachers from across the country, rather than relying on the conventional procedure of choosing someone within the school based on seniority and teaching experience (Hope Nepal, 2005; UNESCO, 2004).

6.4.2 Implications for Theory and Research

Data from other stakeholders such as SMC members and senior teachers, as well as additional observational data would have improved the scope and reliability of this study's results. Even so, this study contributes additional evidence to support the claim that leadership matters as noted by Leithwood and Riehl (2003): "Scratch the surface of an excellent school and you are likely to find an excellent principal. Peer into a failing school and you will find weak leadership"(p. 2). Given the limited studies on school leadership effectiveness in Nepal, future researchers should be encouraged to focus on conducting additional studies involving multiple stakeholders with wider national coverage. Moreover, those studies should attempt to examine the impact of leadership practices on school culture, student outcomes, student motivation, student dropout rates, teacher turnover, teacher motivation, teacher job satisfaction, and community support.

6.5 Final Reflection

The principals from higher performing schools were successful to a greater extent in overcoming many of the challenges including the government inappropriate policy through their leadership qualities. First, these principals demonstrated strong values and vision for academic excellence and strong belief in their ability to bring about positive change in their schools. Second, these principals provided necessary conditions including very basic needs of their schools for teaching and learning. Third, they demonstrated strong commitment to the academic success of their schools and students by developing plans of action to pursue goals focused on improving student achievement. Fourth, they were consistent in providing sustained leadership for their

school improvement. In essence, these principals were active and passionate in providing leadership for academic excellence and they enjoyed greater trust and respect from their stakeholders including teachers, students and parents which was seriously missing in lower performing schools.

The principals from lower performing schools could neither provide leadership to their schools nor they could   demonstrate leadership qualities necessary to revive and sustain past successes achieved at their schools despite the fact that most of these schools were considered successful with glorious history in the past. On the other hand, most of the principals from higher performing schools took over their leadership roles when their schools were underperforming and in poor conditions. The motivation behind taking over the leadership role in difficult times by the principals from higher performing schools was mainly because a) they saw education as a greater good for society (their understanding of education was wider and more profound), b) they were passionate about education including teaching and learning, c) they had strong determination about school improvement and they were consistently firm about their approach, and d) they demonstrated strong values and vision for academic excellence which was common among all these principals, whereas participants from lower performing schools could not demonstrate their strong confidence and determination including strong values and vision.

Besides demonstrating strong commitment to the academic success of their schools and students, the principals from higher performing schools provided examples of how they had been proactive in developing their own internal school policies despite the fact some were in direct contravention with government policy (risk taking), mobilizing and

managing resources to overcome government underfunding, hiring additional teachers

and staff supporting and facilitating teachers and students, focusing on building and

improving infrastructure to provide basic necessary conditions including providing

clean, orderly and safe school environment for teaching and learning at their schools.

According to Leithwood (2012) school leaders who focus on overall organizational

management have greater impact on raising student achievement by developing

appropriate school conditions and by providing resources necessary to students and

teachers.

In this study, higher performing schools turned out to be successful to a greater extent

than their counterparts from lower performing schools due to their principals who could

provide necessary leadership for success including necessary conditions for teaching and

learning resulting in higher pass rate in SLC exams than lower performing schools.

However, the quality of instruction including curricular planning, managing teaching and

learning and supporting teachers in instructional management were not the priorities at

those schools since principals were busier in managing basic needs and conditions,

which still raises serious question on quality education at those schools.

Despite the fact that many of the public schools in developing world including those in

Nepal lack very basic human and physical resources due to chronic underfunding from

their respective governments which is considered as being a major challenge in

developing world (e.g., Khaniya & Kiernan, 1994; Mathema & Bista, 2006; Onderi and

Makori, 2013; Opltaka, 2004; Shrestha, 2008; UNESCO, n.d.; VSO, 2009; Yang and

Brayman, 2010), this study, however, has demonstrated that merely having resources

such as enough teachers and basic infrastructure is not the only necessary condition for

improving teaching and learning. For example, most of the lower performing schools had more than enough teachers and necessary infrastructure in place since many of these schools were among the oldest schools in the country having property in the heart of the capital city worth hundreds of thousands of dollars in terms of buildings and land. Moreover, some of these schools were able to generate additional funds by leasing their property to private sectors. Despite that, these schools have continued to fail in recent years as is evident from lower pass rates and declining student enrollments. Hence, this study has clearly demonstrated that having resources and infrastructure in place is a prerequisite, but not the only necessary condition nor it can compensate effective school leadership by the principals for success of schools and their students.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Protocol.

LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF PRINCIPALS OF SELECTED PUBLIC

SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KATHMANDU, NEPAL

I. Demographic Information

Name of the Participant (Optional):

Name of the School (Optional):

Years of professional experience as a principal:

Highest level of educational qualification:

If not same as indicated above, any teaching degree (Degree in Education):

Length of any professional training received:

II. Interview Questions

1. What do you see as your main responsibilities as a principal? In other words, what do you do as a principal of this school?

   I am now going to ask a series of follow-up questions probing aspects of your understanding of principals' responsibilities.

Probing questions:

a. How are the goals set for this school? What is your involvement in this? How do you develop and communicate your vision for your school? [If no mention of vision, probe by asking about principal's understanding of "school vision"].

b. Many scholars and commentators talk about the importance of school culture. Are you aware about the concept of school culture? [If not, explain it embraces shared understandings about the school learned by teachers and students that influence how things get done]. How would you describe the culture of this school? How do you think you as a principal have influenced this culture?

c. How are you supporting your teachers and students to ensure better teaching and learning in your school?

d. What do you understand by cultivating leadership in school? How are you able to do so in your school?

e. What are the roles and responsibilities of a principal as a manager of the school?

f. What is your organizational structure? How do you manage people and resources in your school?

g. Do you think a principal can bring positive change in school? How do you think it can happen? Can you share some examples of positive changes you brought in your school during your leadership period?

2. What are the major challenges you face in this school?

Probing questions:

a. Have you faced with any challenges in crafting school vision and setting goals?

b. If you think your school culture is not that positive, what are the factors leading the school culture negative?

c. What are the obstacles so that you are not able to support teachers and students for their growth and learning?

d. What are the challenges in your school to develop leadership capacities in others and make them more responsible in their job?

e. Where are you facing problems in managing the resources in your school?

f. What do you think are the main factors responsible for the present condition of your school?

3. Are there anything that we have not covered in this interview which you think are important for us to know?

Appendix B: Information Letter.

LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF PRINCIPALS OF SELECTED PUBLIC

SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KATHMANDU, NEPAL

I am a graduate student at the Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting a research into principals of secondary schools located in Kathmandu, Nepal as a part of the requirement for my master degree in education. I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

This study aims to explore principals' understandings and perceptions of their role and responsibilities. Participation in this study will offer an opportunity for principals to reflect on and describe their work and responsibilities. This study will also provide an opportunity for participating principals to reflect on the challenges they face.

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to attend in interview consisting of open ended questions. These questions will ask you to reflect and share your understandings about your work and responsibilities. You will also be invited to join in focus group discussion with other school principals that will be scheduled at a mutually convenient time after the initial interview. The focus group discussion invites participants to discuss broader issues identified during the interviews. Both the interview and focus group discussion will be audio-taped for transcribing. Interview will last approximately an hour whereas the focus group discussion will last for about 90 minutes.

The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and your identity will be duly protected. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. There are no known risks to participating in this study. Data collected for this study will be

securely stored in a computer using password protection. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without any effect to your personal or professional life. If you decide to participate in this study, please indicate the same by duly signing the consent form which accompanies this letter.

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Ethics, Western University, London, Ontario, Canada. If you have any questions about this study, please contact me and /or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Derek J. Allison. This letter is yours to keep for future reference. I look forward to your participation in the study.

Sincerely,

Shankar Bir Singh

Appendix C: Certificate of Ethics Approval.

Western Research

Research Ethics

Use of Human Participants - Initial Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Derek Allison
File Number:104416
Review Level: Delegated
Protocol Title: LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF PRINCIPALS OF SELECTED PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KATHMANDU, NEPAL
Department & Institution: Education\Faculty of Education,Western University
Sponsor:
Ethics Approval Date: October 18, 2013 Expiry Date: February 28, 2014

Documents Reviewed & Approved & Documents Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Western University Protocol		2013/09/24
Recruitment Items	Initial contact letter.	2013/10/08
Recruitment Items	Telephone script.	2013/10/08
Revised Letter of Information & Consent	Revised LoI	2013/10/08
Revised Letter of Information & Consent	Revised Consent.	2013/10/08
Instruments	Interview protocol.	2013/10/08

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

The Chair of the NMREB is Dr. Riley Hinson. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.
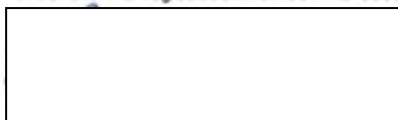
Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

| Grace Kelly (grace.kelly@uwo.ca) | Vikki Tran (vikki.tran@uwo.ca) | Erika Basile (ebasile@uwo.ca) |

This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.

Appendix D

Functions, duties and powers of the principal as given in the Education Regulations

SN	Functions, duties and powers
a	Maintain academic environment, academic quality and discipline,
b	Create an environment of mutual co-operation among teachers and other working staff, students and guardians upon coordinating with the teachers and other employees,
c	Carry out necessary functions for maintaining discipline, good moral character, politeness etc. in the school,
d	Prepare programs for running the classes in the school in consultation with the teachers, and supervise whether or not the classes have been run as per the program,
e	Make or cause to make provision for sanitary, extracurricular and other activities in the school,
f	Operate and control the administrative functions of the school,
g	Admit students in school and cause to conduct examination,
h	Issue transfer and other certificates to students,
i	Keep records for significant works and activities of the school,
J	Recover losses incurred to school property from the salary if a teacher causes such loss knowingly or negligently,

k	Take departmental actions including dismissal from the service on the recommendation of the SMC, against any teacher or employee appointed in the school on its own resources who do not perform their official duties,
l	Maintain records of the penalty given to the teachers and other employees and to show such records to District Education Office and Supervisor when they want to see it,
m	Submit reports relating conduct, behaviour and work performance of teachers and other employees to DEO and SMC,
n	Make recommendation to SMC and DEO for reward and punishment to teachers,
o	Hold teachers meeting at least once a month and discuss on the school related matters and to maintain record thereof,
P	Submit salary reports of the teachers and other employees appointed on the own resources of the school to the SMC for endorsement,
q	Restrain any mischievous activity in the premises of school and hostel,
r	Prepare annual programs of the school and to implement it upon approval of the SMC
s	Prepare monthly, half yearly and annual programs relating to teaching and learning activities in the school and to implement such programs,
t	Send teachers to DEO for training with the approval of the SMC,
u	Expel any student from the school violating discipline,
v	Implement the curriculum and textbooks prescribed by the government in the school,
w	Spend budget as per the direction and powers entrusted to him/her by the SMC and to maintain or cause to maintain the accounts of income and expenditure,

x	Conduct or cause to conduct periodical examinations to be held in school in a regular , fair and dignified manner,
y	Withhold the grade of a teacher for a period of two years if more than fifteen percent of his/her students fail in any subject for a period of three consecutive years or for any act of negligence or against discipline from,
z	Take or cause to take classes in the school daily as prescribed by the government,
aa	Send salary report of the teachers working in the school under the posts approved by the government to DEO for approval,
bb	Prescribe functions and duties of the teachers and other employees working under him/her,
cc	Abide by the directives issues by the SMC and DEO,
dd	Send details and statistics relating to academic progress of the school having it certified by the School Supervisor in the format and within the time prescribed by the government,
ee	Fill up the work performance evaluation forms of teachers appointed on the school's own resources and to submit them to the SMC.

Appendix E

Principals' jobs and responsibilities as identified by the participants based on their

knowledge and understandings.

Item No.	Jobs/ Responsibilities	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	F
A	**Visioning and goal setting**											
1	Prepare school plan and programs	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*		8
2	Collaborate with stakeholders in setting school goals			*	*							2
	Total	1	1	2	2	1	1	0	1	1	**0**	10
B	**Building positive school culture**											
3	Build relationship with students, parents, teachers, and community	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	10
4	Develop learning environment	*	*	*	*	*				*		6
5	Foster a sense of ownership among students, teachers and parents	*	*	*	*	*						5

#	Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
6	Collaborate with stakeholders in decision making	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		9
7	Organize events and celebrations for students and teachers	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	10
8	Create friendly school environment	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	10
9	Create safe and secure school environment						*					1
10	Adopt values that foster individual respect and dignity	*	*	*	*	*					*	6
11	Be consistent in treating others		*									1
12	Build team through appreciation, rewards and motivation		*									1
	Total	7	9	7	7	8	4	4	4	5	4	
C	**Supporting teachers and students to improve learning**											

#												Total
13	Offer motivation, encouragement, and counseling to students	*	*	*	*	*	*					6
14	Provide scholarships needy students (e.g., financial and material supports)	*	*	*	*	*	*			*		7
15	Offer remedial/ tutorial classes to weak students	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*	9
16	Provide facilities, resources, support and good environment to students	*	*	*	*	*	*			*		7
17	Offer necessary resources and motivation to teacher for making teaching and learning effective	*	*	*	*	*	*	*				7
18	Inspire and encourage teachers for their professional excellence	*	*	*	*	*						5
19	Offer professional development opportunities for teachers	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	9
	Total	7	7	7	7	7	6	2	1	4	2	

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
D	**Cultivating leadership qualities in others**											
20	Delegate authority to teachers to better manage school activities	*	*	*	*	*			*			6
21	Offer leadership roles by creating departments and faculties	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	10
	Total	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	
E	**Managing school resources and operation**											
22	Mobilize teachers, parents, SMC and community for generating resources and raising academic excellence	*	*	*	*	*						5
23	Maintain cleanliness and personal hygiene among students	*	*	*	*	*			*	*		7
24	Maintain discipline and order in school	*	*	*	*	*		*				6
25	Manage resources and funding for school	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		9

No	Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
26	Manage support from parents, community and SMC and other stake holders	*	*	*	*	*	*	*				7
27	Recruit additional teachers and staff needed	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*		8
28	Develop and improve physical infrastructure	*		*	*	*	*	*				6
29	Coordinate with teachers, SMC, DEO and other stakeholders		*	*	*	*	*			*		6
30	Supervise and monitor teaching and learning activities	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	10
31	Supervise school operation, construction and maintenance works	*	*	*	*	*	*			*		7
32	Supervise financial transactions and maintain transparency	*	*	*	*	*					*	6
33	Make teachers accountable and responsible	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	9

#	Item											Total
34	Maintain accountability to teachers, parents and SMC	*	*	*	*	*			*			6
35	Manage conflict		*	*								2
36	Prioritize tasks and programs		*									1
	Total	11	14	14	13	13	8	6	4	7	4	
F	**Promoting continuous instructional and organizational improvement**											
37	Strengthen the foundation of the school (e.g., by focusing on early child development classes)	*	*	*		*						4
38	Meet and communicate with students, teachers and parents for improving teaching and learning	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	10
39	Introduce innovation and improvement by acting proactively	*	*	*	*	*						5
	Total	3	3	3	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	
	Grand Total	31	36	35	33	34	21	14	13	19	12	

Curriculum Vitae

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